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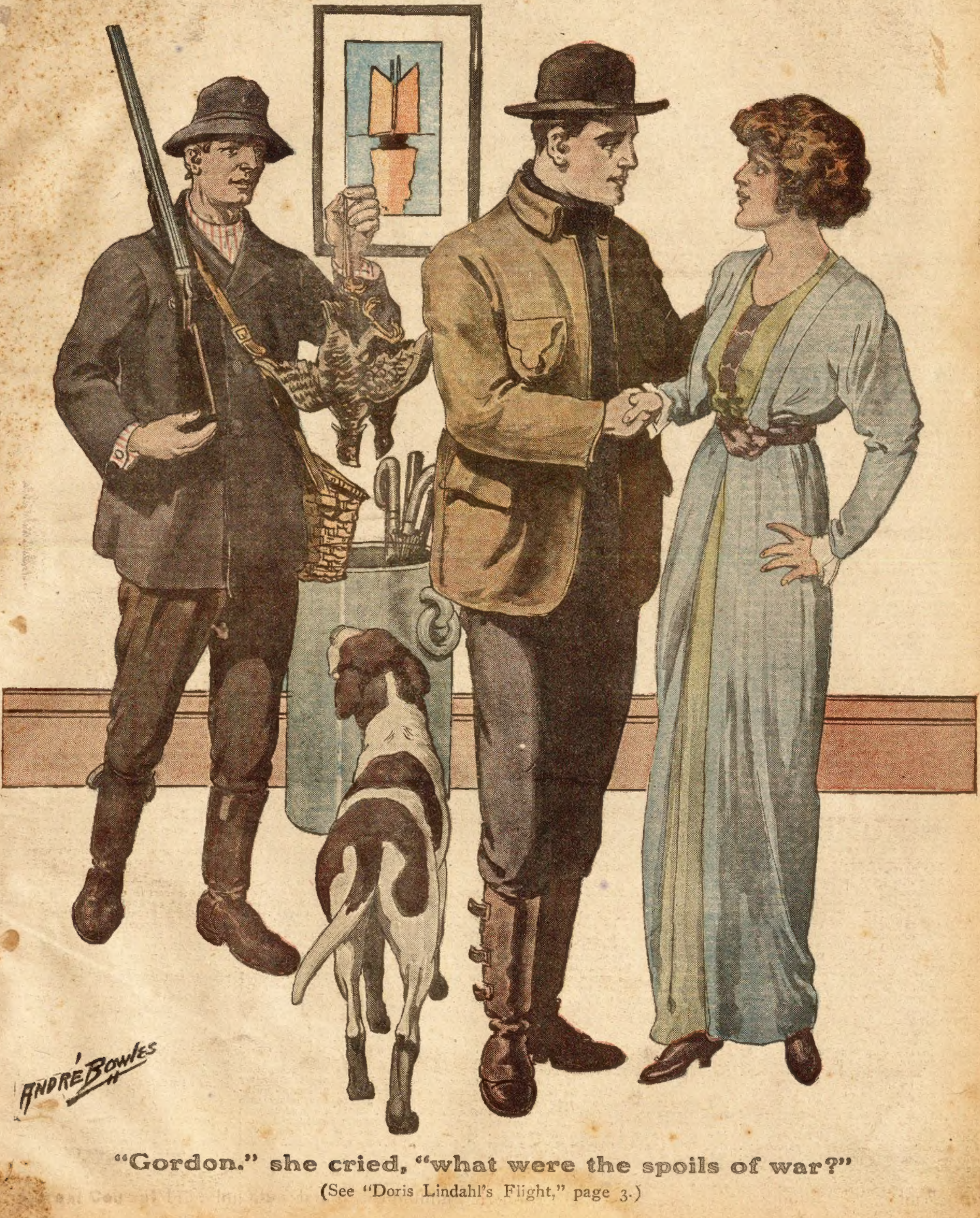


"Gordon," she cried, "what were the spoils of war?"

(See "Doris Lindahl's Flight," page 3.)

A NIGHT CALL

By L. J. WILLIAMS

AS THE Doctor put his foot on the step before entering the cab he felt the hands of the man behind him rest on his shoulders and push him hastily inside. Then he heard a voice from the opposite corner in gruff command:

"Keep still! Don't open your mouth! You'll get well paid for your work, and no harm is intended for you if you don't make a fuss. Mum's the word—understand? And remember I've got this right close to your ribs."

Jones felt the pressure of a revolver against his side and did not reply. He was no coward, but he felt that resistance would be useless under the circumstances. By intuition he knew that he was in the company of desperate men on a desperate errand.

He had had a hard day and was in no amiable mood himself. He did not feel like talking, anyway. He had been ready to retire for the night when his telephone rang, and a man's voice asked him if he would come immediately on a surgical case. Instantly his depression vanished as he gathered his instruments together. The man had told him that a cab would be at his door in ten minutes.

He had not dreamed of anything unusual, for he was called frequently at night to answer emergency calls. His first intimation of an adventure came when he was forcibly bundled into the cab.

No directions were given to the driver, who seemed to understand what was required of him. He started off at a brisk trot down the street, and kept going east in the direction of the river. The two men in the cab sat beside him and said nothing for a square or two. Finally one of them pulled a piece of cloth from his pocket and said:

"Sorry, but we'll have to blindfold you, Doc!"

And suiting the action to the words, he firmly secured the bandage around the prisoner's head. The Doctor submitted as gracefully as he could and then settled back to await the outcome of the strange adventure.

He tried to retain his sense of direction by counting the number of turns the cab made, but they were so many that he had to give it up. He thought that they had been riding an hour or more before he could distinguish anything that would give him an idea of their whereabouts. As the stifling heat was left behind, and the atmosphere became cooler, he knew that they must be in the vicinity of the river.

The vehicle stopped abruptly, and he was helped to the ground and led away. He judged that they had walked half a square or more when he heard a door open. Evidently they were expected. They turned in and began the ascent of an uncarpeted flight of stairs. Everything was still, excepting from above. The Doctor's ear caught the sound of a moaning human voice. They kept on up until they reached the top, when a door opened, and a rough voice said:

"Get busy, Doc; she's in bad shape. Save her, do you understand? That's what you are here for."

Jones felt that there was a veiled threat in the words, but he made no comment. The bandage was torn from his eyes, and he saw a shabby room, around which five men were standing. Their faces were hidden by means of handkerchiefs tied around their heads. In one corner was a cot on which the woman lay. One of the men motioned him to the cot, and he moved over and bent over the recumbent figure.

He called for a light and one of the men took the lamp from its socket in the wall and stood over the cot beside him. No exclamation of surprise came from the Doctor's lips as he saw that face and noticed the texture of the woman's garments. All that the men saw was a cool, indifferent professional scrutiny.

There were no marks on her body other than a severe scalp wound which was bleeding profusely. They said that she had been unconscious for two days. He put his ear to her breast and listened to her heartbeat, meanwhile studying for time, for in a flash he understood. Now he knew what a desperate gang of criminals he was among.

The girl moaned in pain, and he gave her an opiate to ease her. Then he dressed the wound on her head and turned to the men who were awaiting his diagnosis. He knew that she was suffering from concussion of the brain, but would be all right in a day or two. It was not a serious case, but he did not mean to tell them so.

"Men, this is a bad case—fracture of the skull. You will have to keep her very quiet tonight; and in the morning an operation will have to be performed. There is pressure on the brain that must be relieved. I will return in the morning and help you out."

For a moment there was silence. Then one said:

"You'll have to stay, Doc, until your work's done."

In vain the Doctor made the plea of other patients needing him. That was of no consequence to them. Gruffly they told him he might as well take things easy. They were going to keep him until the girl was out of danger.

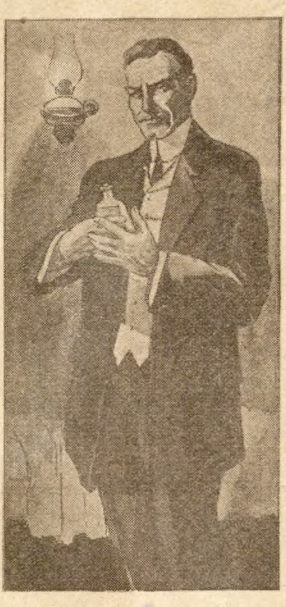
They ordered him into an adjacent room and locked him in. The room was small and very dirty, with no opening save the door. There was a bed and no other furniture.

For some time he walked restlessly up and down the narrow width of the room; but finally in utter weariness he lay prone upon the uninviting bed. He was not sleepy, for his mind was working too busily now. He felt like a man in a hole a thousand feet deep, with no means of escape, yet feeling the absolute necessity of finding a way out. He did not worry about himself. He knew that they would carry him home after they had no more need of him.

It was the woman that he was worrying about. How Seaman would like to know about this. What a scoop he would have over the fellows on the other papers. If he could only get word to him in some way. But that was impossible. They would take him back in the night, blindfolded, and he would not be able to tell them one thing that would help them in the search.

Yes, the search! The police, private detectives, and a horde of newspaper men had been scouring the city for two days for a clew to the whereabouts of the missing Margaret Henderson, the young daughter of a prominent banker. She had disappeared completely during a shopping tour, and her parents were frantic with grief. They had not been able to find a trace of her. And here she was in the hands of a gang of ruffians and he was unable to aid her.

He had mentioned the need of an operation, merely to gain time. He did not know what to do. And when, in the course of an hour or two, he was summoned to her again, his mind was not made up to anything definite.



He saw a small "O. K."

He found that her pulse was a little weak, and gave her a stimulant. As he bent over an idea came to him as an inspiration. He would try it out.

He wrote a prescription, and gave it to one of the men.

"Get this filled at once. She needs it badly. Be as quick as possible, please," he said.

The man left immediately and was gone about half an hour. On his return he handed the bottle to the Doctor, who quietly glanced at the druggist's label. With a thrill of delight he saw that it had come from a store only a square from his home. He wanted to get his bearings, and this was what he had in mind when he had written the prescription. The long ride in the cab had been taken for the purpose of puzzling him. He knew that he was in one of the dilapidated tenement houses along the river front.

He had them bring in hot water which he placed in bottles about her body and she soon recovered. She began to breathe normally and without a moan.

"She will be all right for the night," he said.

He was given the little bedroom for the rest of the night. They locked him in as before. He lay on the bed and soon fell into a doze. It seemed only a little while before some one called him. He felt a hand shaking him by the shoulder and found that they were uneasy again.

"Get up, Doc. She's moaning again," said the man.

The Doctor got up quickly and went to the woman. He gave her another opiate and she soon became quiet again.

Turning to one of them he said that they would have to get some more medicine from the drug store.

"Get it as quick as you can," he said. "If you can't get it at the first store you come to, try the next. I must have it at once. She is not doing well."

The man looked over the slip which the Doctor had given him. It was as unintelligible as the other had been.

The Doctor had written as follows:

Retaw der................	oz. IV
Ereh deppart	dr. I
Namaes llet	dr. I
Lrig Nosredneh	dr. I

M. Sig.—Use as directed.

J.

When the man left the Doctor began to hope that there might be a slim chance after all. He knew that the first man would pass it up; and then they would try Sonenburg. He would decipher it, and would help him. He would get word to Seaman and that was all he needed.

There was nothing to do but wait, so he sat down beside the cot and became absorbed in the symptoms of his patient.

The man was a long time in returning, and the Doctor began to feel anxious. He hoped Sonenburg had done nothing to arouse suspicion, for that would be disastrous both for the woman and for him. He believed that these ruffians would not hesitate to kill them both if they suspected him.

At last the man arrived with the medicine, and nothing had disturbed him.

"It took that Dutchman a long time to find it, Doc," he said. "He said it was a rare drug that was not used often."

The Doctor pulled the stopper and gravely put the bottle to his lips and tasted it. During the ascent he glanced keenly at the label, and saw a small "O. K." written after the directions he had given. This meant volumes to him, for there would be a way out now. Seaman would find him.

Until daylight he sat beside the cot and waited. He hoped they would be careful when they came, so their plans would not fail. What a surprise it would be for the gang to find that all their carefully laid plans had availed them nothing.

He stepped to the window which opened on a dirty back yard, to get a breath of cleaner air, but he was roughly ordered to keep away from it.

"When are you going to operate, Doc?" asked one.

"Just as soon as she is able to stand it," was the reply.

"Well, when do you think that will be?'

"Some time this afternoon," said the Doctor.

They let it go at that, and relapsed into the former gloomy silence. He knew that they were worried over the girl's condition.

Some time near noon, the Doctor heard a short whistle that gave him new courage and hope.

"What's that?" asked one of the men sharply.

"What do you mean?" asked another.

"That whistle. Sounded funny to me."

"Better go to the front and look out."

He went while the others waited in tense silence. The Doctor knew that they were ready for trouble. He wore the same expression of indifference that hid his thoughts like a mask. They had no reason to suspect him, but they were uneasy.

In a few minutes the man returned and the others relaxed at the sight of his face.

"Just a kid going down the street. Nothing else in sight," he said.

The Doctor knew that if a boy had given that call it must have been Johnny Sonenburg. He had taught it to the boy himself. No one else knew it. When he and Seaman had been boys together down in the country they had used it to call each other. He knew that, he had need of self-control now. He must not betray himself. A little patience, and it would all be over.

The men had no further cause for alarm until another hour had passed away. Then it came in the form of a soft step out in the hall. The five were on their feet in an instant and ready with their guns. Nothing happened.

Finally one went to the door, and after unlocking it, pulled it violently open. He kept behind it. Then, as nothing occurred, he peered cautiously into the dark hallway. With a cry of disgust and rage, he sprang out and kicked some object lying on the floor. A cat's yell rent the silence. He came in and locked the door.

"We are getting to be a crowd of old women to start and jump at every whistling kid and scratching cat that happens along," he said.

The Doctor had just given his patient an opiate. He wished to keep her unconscious of her surroundings until she was safe. She should never have cause to shudder at a memory of hours spent in the company of these brutes. He was glad the cat had been there. He did not think that it had merely happened so.

Notwithstanding the scorn of the man who had found the cat, the rascals began to show signs of uneasiness. The Doctor knew that it was that strange premonition of evil that often comes as a warning. They were nervous. They took turns up and down the length of the room. They could not be still.

One came to the cot and looked at the girl. Then he stared at the Doctor. The latter met his gaze unflinchingly and innocently. The fellow went away satisfied.

Because of the nameless thing that had taken hold of them they were of the opinion that one of them should go down stairs and keep watch. They locked the door behind him. They felt safer then and sat down to take up the silent vigil again. They sat with their faces toward the door.

The Doctor happened to glance at the window and saw a shadow for a brief instant. He turned and saw that they had not seen it. He knew that there would be no escape for them by means of the window.

That had been their purpose, he knew, for there were two rope ladders lying on the floor. The first man to try that way would tumble to the yard below with a bullet in his body.

The attack would come from the door, he knew. The cot was in the corner and out of range from the hall, so he waited beside it to welcome the end. There was a heavy shoe on the floor near him. The end came a little sooner than he expected.

With one terrific crash the door fell in A few shots rang out, and two of the rascals fell. The Doctor threw his shoe with skill and got one. The remaining two fought like demons. There was a rush and a fierce struggle for a few moments. The Doctor was in the thick of it, planting blows where they told best. It was soon finished. The men were handcuffed and pushed aside as the rescuers came to congratulate the Doctor.

Seaman took his hand in a strong grip that thrilled his friend.

"How is she, Doctor," he asked.

"All right now. Get her out of this place as soon as you can. Do not let her awaken here," said the Doctor.

"Are you all right yourself?"

"Yes, only a little tired."

"Lucky Sonenburg caught me, for I was just getting ready to leave town for a day or two."

"How did you find out where I was, Seaman?"

"Sonenburg took care of that. One of his kids rode on the back of the cab until it stopped here."

"The rest of it was easy then," said the Doctor.

"Yes, Johnny Sonenburg's whistle, a cat and these friends of mine from headquarters did the rest."

The young woman was carefully carried out of the room and away. In the course of a week she was convalescent and none the worse for her experience with the kidnapers.

Yes, that was their game. One of the gang confessed to the Doctor before he left the room after the capture.

"Doc, you're a slick one," he had said, after confessing. "Would you mind telling me how you put one over us?"

"Not at all, friend," was the reply. "I merely sent my friends a message in that last prescription that went to the drug store."

"But how in——"

"I merely wrote the message backward," said the Doctor, laconically.

* * *

There Were Others.

The conversation turned to the sad and castdown appearance of a rejected suitor, when Congressman Howard Sutherland of West Virginia remarked that the jilted gentleman couldn't have been as wise as a certain party in an Eastern city.

The certain party had proposed to a beautiful girl something like a dozen times, and on each occasion the answer had been a negative one. Still he persevered, and one night on a moonlight walk with the soft south wind blowing caressingly, he once more started to tell her of his wondrous love.

"Della, dear, there is something that I must tell you before we return. You have heard it before, but——"

"Look here, Jimmy!" impatiently interjected the beautiful girl, "how many more times are you going to ask me to marry you?"

"Not many, I guess, Della, dear," answered the young man with great frankness. "One of the other three girls that I am proposing to is beginning to show signs of weakening."

* * *

Another Escape.

Another one of those ways in which the pestered can shut up the pestering:

"Do you suffer from a cold in the head?" asked the kindly butter-in of the snuffer on the street car.

"Invariably, when I have one!" growled the victim. And thereby escaped another remedy.

Doris Lyndahl's Flight

Or, The Girl-Wife's Test -:- By Mason Ray

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CHAPTER I.

GORDON LYNDAHL'S girl-wife, wrapped in the soft folds of a crimson shawl, sat musing on the top step of a rustic stair. Below, where a boat was moored, rippled the waters of an inland lake. On either hand were the handsome grounds of an immense park wrested from the encroaching forest. A graveled path circled the wide sweep of lawn and led to a white dwelling built in Colonial style, with pillared veranda and railed balcony.

"'Where every prospect pleases——'"

Abruptly the girl ended the quotation and sprang to her feet. The act sent flying, like a flight of tropical birds, her lapful of autumn leaves, and disclosed her slender, graceful form. What she lacked in height was supplied by high-combed hair of nut-brown. Velvety brown eyes gazed dreamily from a face as pure of outline and clear cut as a cameo. Her delicate, cleft chin betrayed the temperament of the idealist.

For some moments she surveyed the western horizon, where miles of tawny sand-dunes were glorified by the divergent flames of a setting sun.

"'And only man is vile,'" she finished in a whisper.

Slowly, reluctantly she followed the path to the wide steps, ran up them, and entered a square hall from which ascended a staircase finished in natural wood. Her crimson wrap was tossed upon deer's horns that formed a rack. Still reluctantly moving, she opened a door at the left and entered the general livingroom. Before an open wood fire, engaged at working with white wools, sat a regally handsome matron. She glanced up as Doris entered; her keen steel-gray eyes were eloquent of reproof.

"Doris," she commented sharply, "you're impractical. You seem to care for nothing but artistic views."

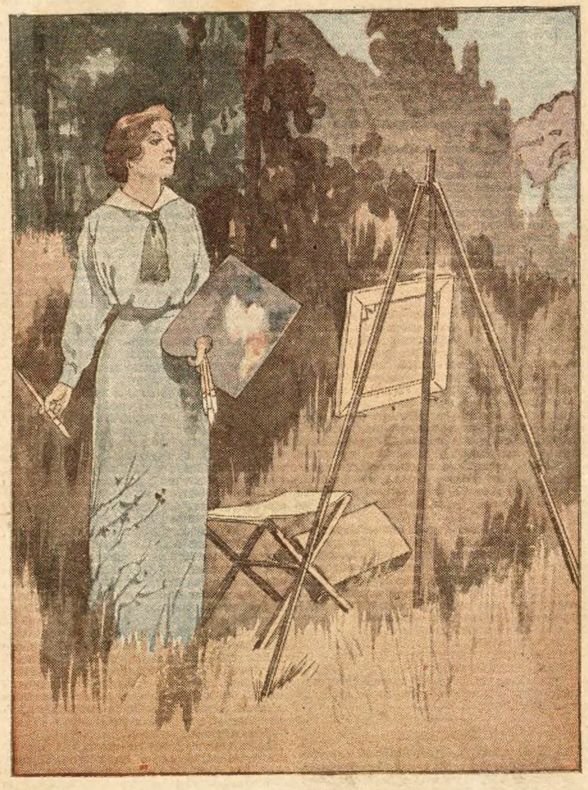
The criticism was characteristic. Gordon Lyndahl's mother abhorred what she was pleased to term slackness, and never lost an opportunity to voice her sentiments. Guiltily Doris possessed herself of an unfinished bit of Kensington and began to select shades of silk. The hideous sprawl of stamped outline revolted her artistic taste. For three blissful years she had studied sketching. Her progress had been abnormal because of natural aptitude. The death of her widowed mother and their exhausted means ended her hope of a year at the Paris studios. Then came marriage, but her love of art was a banked fire; self-culture relieved the motonony of many lonely hours while Gordon Lyndahl was absent on imperative business. Now, because the elder woman's reproving gaze compelled her to industry, she worked diligently but with divided attention.

The queenly woman by the hearth seemed to her facile imagination to be formed of steel. Each side of the high brow waved iron-gray hair; the large, fine regular features might have been cast in a mold. From neck to ankle she wore neat, tightly fitting cloth of glistening drab. Her manner was pre-eminently decisive; she emanated an air of long established authority.

For a time the two women worked almost in silence. Madam Lyndahl was not inclined to chatter idly. Her aim was accomplishment. She attempted to convert every manageable person about her into a vehicle of perpetual motion. Caring little for books, she vented her insatiable energy on the manufacture of innumerable knitted, embroidered and sewed garments. Doris, seated in a low rocker by the wide front windows, drew lemon-colored thread in and out with many longing glances at the riot of beckoning autumn color on the hillsides. Then, suddenly dropping the uncongenial task on the wide window sill, she slipped from the room, mounted the stairs, turned to her right, and entered a combined sittingroom and sleeping apartment, whose front windows gave an entrancing vista of hill-guarded lake, while side windows showed distant forest, rich hued with autumn tints and lighted by the still blazing sunset.

Having gained this privacy, the girl-wife stood facing the glowing west with unseeing eyes that darkened to midnight pools. Her ivory-white face clouded. The arched lips drooped. Studied repression was cast aside like a garment. She seemed to have taken on a new personality.

"What's the reason of this rebellion?" she murmured. "Why can't I renounce my individuality and be the thing she wishes? Why can't I become reconciled to living by rote and rule? To inhabiting a home that is not mine in any sense? What prevents my becoming an orderly puppet—a wooden automaton—instead of me, rebellious, hateful me?"



She had placed her camp stool and easel.

She sank into a chair, and covering her face, burst into uncontrollable weeping. Accumulated distress of mind from months of petty annoyances now had expression. Sobs shook the slender form; her very soul was washed in a flood of grief. Finally the storm subsided and she sat quietly pondering.

"I must be bad," she mused, "thoroughly, ingrainedly bad."

Sadly she rose to her feet and carefully bathed her tear-stained face at the pretty white-draped washstand. She then seated herself before a writing desk, abstracted from the locked drawer a partly finished drawing, and was soon absorbed in adding detail. The view represented her conception of an old English farm scene described in Eliot's "Middlemarch." Its dominant note was heart-lulling, all pervading peace. Her mood became attuned to its pacific charm. The next sketch she took from the drawer portrayed a vastly different subject. Indistinct in the background rose the grim outline of a tumbril unloading victims of the French Commune at the side of La Guillotine. Spreading away like a human wave were the staring populace; but in the foreground, a central commanding figure, sat Therese Defarge, the famous knitter of that reign of blood. Ruthless, fearless, determined she sat, gray-robed, with the coarse red cap on her dark hair. Her pitiless face with its large, handsome features was turned in profile as she counted the prisoners and recorded the number by means of the threads she wove. As the young artist touched up the sketch with a line here a bit of color there, she saw that which caused her to gasp in horror.

Under her newly observant eyes the strong features of the dread French woman oddly duplicated the proud face of the woman below, knitting before the open wood fire. Imperative, confident, masterful, the gray-robed figure took on a familiar personality. Unconsciously the artist had painted in the woman who dictated the details of her daily living. She had delineated the imperious being who ruled every member of her small realm save Gordon, the only and equally imperious son. Dismayed at her discovery, Doris tore the sketch to fragments. She was frightened at the import of that unintended but unflattering comparison. Surely the friction between her own and the elder woman's temperament was luring her to an abnormal state of mind. She resolved to thrust the feeling from her heart. Its existence was a menace to peace.

Twilight shadows filled the room. She put away her sketching materials, then selected from a closet a dainty gown of blue. When donned it displayed to perfection her graceful form, with exquisite curves at hip and shoulder. The round-cut yoke displayed the warm ivory of her satiny skin. She seemed to brighten in spirit as she thus enhanced her brilliant beauty. The large velvety eyes smiled back from the mirror above her dressing table. Being but twenty, she gloried in her own loveliness and craved admiration.

"Surely," she mused, "Gordon will be pleased. He'll be glad that I care for my appearance."

The opening of the hall door, tramping of feet, sound of voice and the barking of dogs warned Doris that her husband, attended by Jud Kilbeam, his guide and barn boy, had returned from hunting. Joyfully she descended the oak stairway. Her raiment, the fleetness of her descent, made her appear in the dim light like an earth-seeking bird of gay plumage.

"Gordon," she cried, "I'm glad you've come! What were the spoils of war? What luck?"

"A brace of partridge and two fish-eaters," Gordon Lyndahl answered. "Then we fished. The bag's half filled with trout." He clasped her hand with a fleeting gleam of admiration in his eyes, then turned indifferently.

The two men were busied at hanging guns and placing reels. The master was of medium height, but his build was compact and massive. His large, finely formed head was covered with thick, dark, waving hair; and his strong face gave the impression of tremendous inner force and quiet self-mastery. This hint of latent power and immense reserve was emphasized by the cool, level glance of his gray eyes and the set of his firm jaw.

The guide, having hung a shotgun on its hooks, waited for orders. His clear, wide-open blue eyes were quietly observant. Having been obliged during his self-supporting years to live by his wits, they were sharpened in the process. Now his eyes beheld an uncommonly beautiful woman, and his wits had long ago registered the fact that her position in the household was not desirable.

"Take the bag around to the kitchen," Lyndahl told him. "I want the game prepared at once. And say," he called, "whistle the dogs after you."

A piercing note summoned the two hounds—one evenly white except a spot over the right eye and the other splashed with brown. Then wife and husband were alone.

"I wish, Gordon, that I might dress suitably and join you at sport after the manner of English women," observed Doris. "The days pass very slowly," she admitted, and stood with face invitingly raised for the always desired, but often omitted caress.

But Lyndahl's mind was fully occupied with memory of the day's chase. He failed to note his young wife's wistful appeal; moreover, he was blind to her loveliness. Objects about him, to which he was accustomed, escaped especial notice. He was pre-eminently practical, wholly undemonstrative, and ten years his wife's senior.

"I'm nearly famished," he declared. "Jud and I tramped over to Elkhorn River. And beastly tired," he added.

"I'll speak to Martha about hastening dinner," cried Doris, forgetting that Gordon's plaint about hunger had formed his greeting. "She shall send in coffee at once," she promised, happy at ministering.

In the kitchen all was confusion. Birds and trout were to be cooked, but the former had still to be denuded of feathers and the latter properly prepared. Jud assisted Lucy, the second maid, in this interesting process, and at the same time unburdened his mind.

"I swan," he declared, "this fixing game after tramping miles to git it ain't my idear o' sport."

"What is your idear o' sport?" mimicked Lucy. Her comely face was, as usual, alight with laughter. Her throat was a well of giggles.

"Eatin' 'em," explained the guide.

"Raw, with scale and feather trimmings?" she queried.

"Never see but one living object that I wanted to swaller raw," gallantly stated Jud, with a meaning look at the rosy cheeked maid.

"Quit dat foolin'!" ordered Martha, the cook, who was a thin, angular mulatto. "It's high time them birds was broiling. Mis' Lin'le ain't goin' to wait while yo' two does yo' courtin'. Hussle up!"

"Please," said Doris at the kitchen doorway, "Mr. Lyndahl would like dinner served as soon as possible. And Martha, I wish you'd send him in a cup of hot coffee at once. He's very tired."

"Dinner's in an hour from now," explained Martha. "It's being got 'zactly 'cording to missis' orders. We can't go changing plans jes' de las' minute. An' de coffee, 's allus along o' the puddin'.

The young wife withdrew, feeling like an interloper. Madam Lyndahl had perfected all arrangements. This machine-like system had existed many years, and Martha, being an old family servant, recognized no authority but that of the former regime. Doris was in truth a trespasser when she entered Martha's kingdom.

When the evening meal was finally served, it amply rewarded Gordon for waiting; it was a triumph of Martha's skill. Moreover, the diningroom, beyond an arch from the big livingroom, presented a scene of light and cheer. The snowy linen, sparkling silver and glass, the bright illumination by means of ornamental lamps, the frescoed walls and antique furnishing of polished woods, contrasted pleasantly with the more somber shades of the still unlighted sittingroom.

"Heath Merrill, the publisher, will be here this week," announced Lyndahl, when the almost silent dinner reached dessert. "He comes up for the fall hunting. Better have his room ready; there's no knowing when he starts."

This last suggestion was directed toward his mother. She always assumed the responsibility of his guests' comfort, and he saw no reason why she should discontinue this household duty. His astonishment would have equaled his annoyance if he had divined the bitter resentment Doris felt at being ignored in the domestic scheme.

However, when the three were seated in their accustomed places about the glowing log fire, she forgot that Madam Lyndahl chose to maintain a frozen front because of her flight from the sewing-room; she even forgave Gordon's newspaper barrier while contemplating the agreeable prospect of visitors at Lyndahl Terrace. With small slippered feet before the blaze, she idly watched the crackling logs. Vainly the elder woman ominously clicked her steel knitting needles in a manner that spoke to

Doris of neglected duty. Veiled hints failed to move the delinquent. Doris drew her chair close to Gordon's, and caught down the war news that absorbed him.

"Tell me about the publisher," she begged. "Is he old or young, and is he also a writer? What books has he issued?"

"I don't know, Doris," he said in answer to the last query. "You know I abominate fiction, especially modern books."

Again he settled comfortably with his cigars and war news while Doris, who had ventured this attempt at comradeship by sheer courage, subsided behind a favorite volume. She read until her eyes were heavy-lidded, then stole from the room and up the stairs. Gordon failed to note her absence.

Within her isolated and chilly apartment the young wife experienced a sensation of relief. This spot was home. No sharp-eyed surveillance marred her ease. She was free to act naturally. She was free from an unacknowledged but ever-present restraint. She struck a light, then busied herself by donning a rose-hued dressing gown of silk and lace and brushing out her shining nut-brown hair. Madam Lyndahl had angrily protested against the dainty extravagance of the silken robe, but Doris had timidly, yet stubbornly, maintained her point. These contradictory traits loomed prominently in the girl's character. She feared yet persisted. She dared not brave the stronger will, yet something compelled her to individual action. With her the love of personal liberty was a passion.

Slowly she braided her dark tresses into two strands that hung below her waist. Her large eyes met her image in the mirror luminous with coming sleep. The arched lips, slightly parted, revealed even, pearly teeth, in one of which gleamed a tiny flash of gold. Her rich, clear complexion of ivory-white, the long, curved lashes, the indented chin, the cascade of creamy lace falling back from the rounded satin of her throat gave to the tall mirror the vision of a lovely child. With conjured visions from the book she had read floating through her sleepy mind, she nestled among the white pillows. Then she started wide awake at the sound of resounding knocks on the hall door, and then heard the front door flung wide and her husband's voice exclaiming:

"Hello! By George, it's Heath Merrill!"

"And Heath Merrill's nephew," cried a younger voice. "Uncle Heath had to fetch the whole family."

"I've preceded the date," admitted a grave, quiet voice, "but I found it convenient to leave the office earlier than I expected."

"And Uncle Heath always does what's convenient—and unexpected," chaffed the nephew's clear tones.

"Our driver stops with people at the village. He dumped us out with our luggage and bolted," explained the publisher's voice.

After that there came the sound of opening and closing doors, the diminuendo of retreating steps, finally indications of activity in the region of the kitchen, and then the listener, who had no part in the reception of these strangers, slept.

When young Mrs. Lyndahl entered the sun-flooded diningroom the following morning, she became agreeably aware of a new social atmosphere. The newcomers were standing before the fireplace, and Gordon immediately presented to her an overly tall man of almost swarthy countenance, whose hair was Indian-like in blackness, and whose wonderfully expressive eyes were coal black. In marked contrast to his aboriginal appearance was a polished manner, Chesterfieldian in courtliness and delicately considerate.

"You see, Mrs. Lyndahl," he observed, "there was a night invasion when you were helpless. And this youngster is the other midnight prowler. My nephew, Dick Merrill," he said, motioning toward that individual.

Doris turned to receive the proffered hand of a youth of the nondescript age when the extremeties are an embarrassment. Dick was his uncle's opposite in physical appearance, being exceedingly fair, with eyes like a summer sky and inclined to quick laughter.

"Uncle Heath calls me an invader, but instead I'm a captive," the boy declared, with unexpected gallantry. "So you must make me welcome, Mrs. Lyndahl."

"Not an unwilling prisoner, I hope," laughed Doris.

"You'll notice, Mrs. Lyndahl, that there will be no attempt at escape," dryly commented the uncle; "he'll appear simultaneously with the meals. In fact, he may haunt the storeroom."

"Now, Uncle Heath, what do you know about that?" flashed the lad, and slipped into the chair indicated by Madam Lyndahl, which chanced to be at Doris's side. As usual, the elder woman poured coffee at the head of the table; Gordon occupied a seat opposite, with his wife at his right and the dark-skinned Chicagoan at his left.

"Dick's language may astonish you," Merrill observed to Doris. "It needs expurgating; you'll think he's from the Bowery, but I've really given him excellent educational advantages."

"I'm his forlorn and frenzied hope," solemnly stated the nephew.

Doris smiled and Heath Merrill thought he had never beheld so lovely and radiant a vision. The girl-wife, in a cream-tinted morning gown ornamented with ribbons of a deeper hue, looked as if she might have stepped down from the Academy's most favored portrait. Excitement tinged her usually pale cheeks and lent smoldering fire to her large dark eyes.

"We'll try that Elkhorn runway," Gordon told his guest, relative to their day's sport. "When we're fagged we can fish."

"Strikes me," Dick hazarded, at the close of the meal, "that I'd best hunt with a steel trap. I'm no shot. Couldn't hit a flock of aeroplanes."

"Dick lacks the sporting instinct," explained his uncle. Then to the lad: "You'd hardly want to kill an animal that got fast. Besides, you might blunder and catch yourself."

"If I do," Dick commented, "you'll hear the 'call of the wild.'"

"Get out your tennis stuff, Doris," suggested Gordon. "Possibly Dick enjoys tennis."

The boy's eyes shone. "I'm the strong-arm champion," said he.

"Surely, Doris, you can't spare your morning," objected Madam Lyndahl in an aside. "Lucy will need assistance."

"Then get an extra girl up from the village," commanded Gordon, who caught the remark.

This was not to the elder woman's mind. The Lyndhal means had been seriously depleted through mismanagement of Lyndahl senior, prior to his death; this fact accounted for the family's retirement to their country estate, and resulted in Madam Lyndahl setting up economy as a god to be worshiped. It also accounted for Gordon Lyndahl's absence from home during long periods. Much property was under litigation, and the son was fighting to save a remnant. At the present time a stay of proceedings gave him October in the woods, and, being prodigiously fond of outdoor life, he spent every possible hour on the trail.

Host and older guests soon departed with guns, tackle, dogs and the guide, who, at other times, served as chore boy about the house and barn. Doris and Dick joyfully unearthed the tape, net and balls of the long-abandoned court. And presently Lucy, who possessed ears and used them, heard the constantly recurring and astonishing calls of:

"Love fifteen!"

"Love all!"

"Hully gee! Beat it!"

"One's 'nough for me," mused the puzzled maid. "And to talk such stuff is scandalous."

CHAPTER II.

THAT evening the group about the sittingroom fire contrasted sharply with the lone trio of the night before. Merrill and his host were engulfed in deep chairs, with the fire-glow on their faces, talking reminiscently of the day's sport. Dick and Doris sat by the great oak table that occupied the center of the room and examined photographs of the surrounding region. The latter, in a close-fitting gown of cardinal, with cheeks and eyes aglow, formed a brilliant jewel in that setting of rich browns; for the immense rug on the hardwood floor was of russet-hued plush, the walls a tone of sepia, the heavy furnishings of polished oak, and the woodwork was stained and varnished in harmony. As usual, Madam Lyndahl, severely clad in gray, plied her flashing needles, while her keenly observant eyes noted all that passed about her.

"The scenery here is all on edge," Dick commented. "It seems fairly to rear up on its hind legs and butt into the sky. It's great!"

"I love it," cried Doris. "If I were a Landseer, I'd put it all on canvas, then die of grief because the attempt failed to more than hint at the glories."

"Don't gush, Doris," reproved Gordon's mother. "You think and talk in pictures. They're of no practical use. They're frivolous."

"Do you know," Merrill was saying, "that women are giving their brothers of the pen-and-ink profession a lively race? More than half our contributors are of the fair sex."

"I abhor that type of woman," declared Lyndahl, with heat. "A cultured woman should be diffident and unassuming. The feminine journalist is a disgrace to her sex; she verges on the type of militant suffragette. She's an uncrowned queen, shed of the trappings of royalty, and forging to the front in manly guise."

"Yet," insisted the publisher, "many true women are battling in the vanguard for the bread they and their loved ones eat."

"Rather than allow a wife or daughter of mine to flaunt my name in public, I'd see her buried," Lyndahl said harshly. "I hate the strong-minded, undomestic type. If I had been so unfortunate as to have acquired one for a mate, I'd free myself at all cost. They're revolting."

Merrill glanced at his friend in amazement. But could he have known that his host had once been jilted by an independent woman, who chose individual emolument instead of domestic gain, he would have understood the other's bitterness.

Dick chafed at the venom of the uncongenial topic.

"Let's go out on the lake, Mrs. Doris," he urged. "The moonlight's heavenly and the water's flat's a pancake."

"Your comparisons are contrasty," laughed Doris. "But I'm with you. Come!"

"If you intend anything so indiscreet as to go on the lake at this time of night," admonished Madam Lyndahl, "wear your thick shoes. And take my heavy shawl with you," she called after them.

Doris complied, but this irritatingly constant espionage galled. She believed herself capable of judging what garments were suitable. The shawl, moreover, seemed oddly enough to emanate something of the personality of the owner. With a feeling akin to repugnance she rolled it up and placed it beneath the boat's rear seat as if that exorcised an evil spirit.

During the remainder of that evening and many others, the girl-wife and her boy friend floated over the golden shimmer of moonlit water. Occasionally Dick induced his uncle to join them while Gordon was busied at necessary tasks. At these times Doris unrestrainedly discussed books, music and art, never dreaming that the publisher led her on to reveal the beauty of her thoughts. Being a sophisticated, clever man of the world, Merrill was not slow in accurately solving the equation of that singular household. He knew that the girl harbored a starved soul; that she possessed an intellect that sooner or later would burst the circumscribed bounds, and that the time of release was near. His worldly sense told him that, unless she discovered a natural outlet for her mental energies, havoc might ensue.

Madam Lyndahl noted these excursions with unqualified disapproval. She sought to prevent them by inventing obstructing tasks. That her son's wife was vastly entertained by the publisher's book lore was plainly shown by the recurring talks at table and fireside. Madam was of the old school, and distrusted the motives of men who conversed much with young girls. She advocated silence for women, and preferred that Doris should confine her remarks to the commonplace.

For several delightful weeks Gordon and his guest tramped the woods with Jud as guide, drove to distant streams, or trolled the lake in company with Dick. Bags of game and baskets of fish piled the kitchen table. From that point they gravitated through the magic of Martha's art to the diningroom, where they were assailed by hungry sportsmen. Dick's trapping, for a time, lacked encouragement. To his uncle's persistent inquiries regarding what the traps held, Dick invariably if slangily remarked:

"There's nothing in it."

Then luck turned; he succeeded beyond his wildest dreams; he declared later that his good fortune outdid the most rampant nightmare. The affair occurred shortly after the midday lunch. Heath Merrill had excused himself from the table to write up his neglected business correspondence. Gordon started alone for a try at fox hunting. Madam Lyndahl and Doris had assisted in household matters, whereupon the former resumed her wools, while Doris gathered up her sketching materials and departed for a glade in the woods that she wished to paint in colors while the scene was lighted by unusually brilliant sunshine. She had placed her camp stool and easel, and was absorbed by the view, when she was startled by Dick's voice excitedly calling:

"Pinch your nose, Mrs. Doris, and edge up, so's I can tell you something," he yelled.

"You seem able to communicate perfectly without my resorting to strangulation," she laughed back.

"But I don't want to come over there by the path, and I'd rather not inform the neighborhood. I've a secret here that won't keep. It's too rotten bad to keep. Please edge up and help."

Explanation was rendered superfluous because of an overpowering odor that gently wafted toward the artist. With her handkerchief closely applied to her face, Doris advanced through a bit of thick underbrush.

"I'm it," Dick confided, when he could make himself heard at a moderate pitch of tone. "There was an animal in my trap; but by the shades of Sherlock, it's worse 'en catching smallpox! Leprosy's teething compared to it."

"Did you put the poor thing out of its misery?" anxiously and humanely gasped Doris, with her nasal appendage tightly gripped.

"That's what the matter," cried Dick. "Now I want you to do the same for me."

"What, club you to death?" queried Doris, laughing despite Dick's wretched plight.

"That's what I deserve," agreed the disgusted lad. "But I want you to sneak me my glad rags out of the trunk in uncle's room. He's out of the way, for I just saw him hitting the trail west under a shotgun. Be sure no one sees you. I wouldn't have any of my bunch know about this for a farm. Uncle Heath's just wearisome when he gets a joke on me. I don't want him to know I was mutt enough to club a skunk. Now, go, please, and hurry!"

With her precious sketchbook under her arm, Doris hastened on her benevolent errand. Fortune favored her secret mission. No person was in sight as she entered the hall and ran upstairs. Entering the room assigned to the publisher, she placed her sketchbook on his writing table until she could abstract Dick's best suit from the small steamer trunk. As she removed the garments and rolled them into small space in order to conceal them under her long blue all-enveloping cape, she smiled at remembrance of the boy's adventure. Then compassion filled her heart and she hastened from the room. As she stepped from the doorway, dismay sent the blood to her face in a burning tide for, framed in the opposite space and just quitting her own sleeping apartment, stood Madam Lyndahl.

The young wife could not betray Dick's secret and her paralyzed brain could invent no excuse for her presence. Nothing remained but flight. With an incoherent remark about the sunlight, Doris sped down the stairs and out into the open. Mentally she resolved to tell Madam Lyndahl the whole story after Dick's departure. With a tinge of natural resentment, she reflected that explanation of her simple act should be unnecessary. She did not know that Gordon's mother believed the publisher still sat in his room before the writing table. She could not surmise that the elder woman placed the worst construction on what she witnessed. Instead, the young artist speedily remembered that she had, in her haste, forgotten to pick up the book of sketches she had temporarily relinquished. This was extremely annoying. To return for it at once was out of the question, but she hoped for an opportunity to remove it before Merrill's return. To have requested Gordon's mother for assistance in her predicament would have been the natural solution, but when she recalled the stern face that regarded her from across the upper hall, and when she remembered the older woman's deep-rooted objection to her sketching hobby, she dared not mention her loss.

"Have you got 'em?" Dick queried anxiously, as Doris appeared.

"Measles?" asked Doris. "Or what?" She produced her bundle, deposited it at a comfortable distance, then retreated.

"That's them," Dick declared thankfully, but ungrammatically. "And soap! You're a brick. I'll have a transformation act at the creek. If Uncle Heath detects the remains of this perfume he can take it out in guessing. And, say, you're the best ever. Thanks awfully, and now go away."

Doris obeyed his injunction, but not feeling equal to an interview with Madam Lyndahl, she discarded her stool and easel and wandered along leafy byways until she reached her favorite seat on the top step of the boat landing. As she idly mused, the sound of steps attracted her attention. Glancing toward the wide veranda, she saw her husband and Heath Merrill mount the steps and enter the front door. They had unexpectedly returned from the chase. With a flush of embarrassment, Doris perceived that the opportunity for rescuing her book had passed. She must wait until chance favored.

That evening Dick appeared at the dinner table immaculate in attire and grooming. But from his unfortunate person there emanated a sickly odor that, like Banquo's ghost, would not down. Doris perceived that questioning glances were fixed on the frank-faced, clear-eyed source, but Dick maintained an air of abstraction.

"Dick," accused his uncle, unable to keep silence, "where have you been?"

"Hunting," admitted Dick.

"Hunting what," demanded the suspicious publisher. "Trouble?"

"Coon," explained the nephew.

"Well, did you catch him?" queried the uncle, with meaning.

"Never caught a coon in my life," evaded Dick, and this ended the sparring.

Madam Lyndahl's manner toward Doris was the same as usual, neither more frigid nor less cordial. Therefore the younger woman concluded that the incident of the upper hall was forgotten. She likewise hoped that the publisher had not discovered her sketches, since he made no reference to the fact. Altogether, the trapping affair seemed happily ended.

The last inference was erroneous. Heath Merrill, in fact, noticed the etchings because they reposed on top of his half-written letters and he could not avoid them. Astonished at their presence, he opened the book, read Doris's name on the cover, then arrived at what —to a publisher—formed a logical conclusion. This was nothing less than that the girl wished to sell drawings to his publishing house. Every week of the year the Merrill Publishing Company received hundreds of manuscripts and illustrations offered without other hint than the name of the would-be contributor. Consequently he, from force of habit, turned the pages with critical eye. Among the sketches were many original conceptions of scenes from famous books. The wilderness about Lyndahl

(Continued on page nineteen.)

The Palace of Doom

Or, The Passion of an Empress - By Hugh Hamilton

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CHAPTER V.

THE POISONED WINE.

IF THE beautiful Countess Carloff hoped to outwit the Empress Catherine by gaining the assistance of Ursus, the Cossack, she was apt to reckon without her host. Something desperate had to be done to circumvent this imperial ruler, else she would gain her point, and both Xenia and her lover, Paul, would feel the weight of her iron hand.

The message which the girl, Dreva, carried to the Carloff palace from Ivan Panine told its fair mistress that he had at one time, during a campaign in the North, saved the life of Ursus's little daughter, and that the Cossack in return for the heroic act had pledged himself to aid him at any time. Thus Xenia was in a position to seek the friendship of Catherine's giant guard, and we have seen how the attempt succeeded.

Ursus, when informed that Panine was yet living, pledged the Countess that he would sleep, or pretend to sleep, between certain hours, for Ivan's message had told her that at such a time she could elude espionage, and with Paul, be on the way out of St. Petersburg headed for a safe asylum.

Eagerly for love of Paul did the Countess embrace the opportunity, and when she saw Ursus once more take up his station on the steps, she began to make preparations for the journey. To get beyond the grip of the great Empress was hope of the lovers, for both knew that another blow would fall, and after that it would be too late.

But there were spies in St. Petersburg who never slept. These men in the pay of Catherine stood ready to perform every duty without mercy, and many a poor subject had gone to the heartless mines amid the cold wastes of Siberia through their machinations.

If Ivan Panine thought his return from exile had not been discovered, he was hugging a delusion to his bosom. Siberia gave up few who never went back to the toil and death of its confines.

Dreva had scarcely reported the success of her mission, when a little man in the uniform of the secret police received another personage like himself. Alex Dragine, the merciless head of the secret service, met his visitor with the merest glance.

"I've found the flying fox," reported the spy, dangling his hat in his hands.

"Well?"

"It is true that he has escaped."

"And is in the city?"

"Yes."

"You know what to do, Levan," and Dragine turned again to his desk. The spy watched his superior for a moment and lowered his eyes.

"Shall it be tonight?" he ventured.

Dragine turned his head and centered the wrath of his dark eyes upon the police menial.

"Now!" said he.

"Whither shall we take him?"

"Have we not Saints Peter and Paul?"

"We have, master."

"Come to me when you have caged this bird. That is all."

With another glance at the heartless Dragine, the spy slouched away.

Meantime Ivan Panine was seated in his hiding-place, poring over a map which he had spread upon the table. A dim light revealed his colorless face and his long, thin hands. His finger was tracing a line across the map, and now and then it stopped as if the way to safety was broken.

"When Paul comes," he suddenly said, lifting his head, "he must not refuse. To remain is death or worse—Siberia! The Countess will not refuse. She will urge him to fly, and tonight the road is clear to the coast. It is many versts and a cold ride, but love warms their hearts, and when they are safe from Catherine, Ivan Panine will have had his revenge. I've waited years for such an hour. But for this I would have died in the mines. In that hell of the North I warmed myself with my thoughts of vengeance. Aha! my beautiful Empress! One lover is about to slip through your fingers, and Paul Daroski and his love will be happy where you cannot touch them."

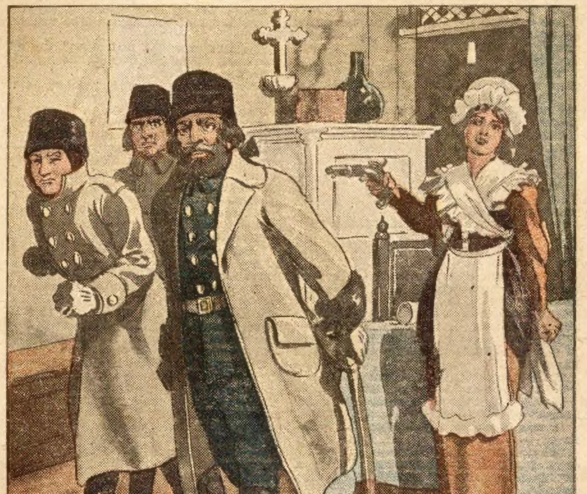
He paused and looked up. That moment a door opened and Dreva thrust in her head.

"The signal?" she said, looking at Ivan. "It must have been such."

"Three raps, a pause, and then another?"

Dreva nodded.

"Admit him, girl."



"You will go without me."

In another moment Paul Daroski entered the room. He was well disguised, and Ivan, seeing through it, smiled and waved him to a chair at the table.

"I've got it all thought out," the exile went on. "I'm sure we've corrupted Ursus."

"What, bribed that bear of the steppes?"

"Yes, my dear Paul. A lion can be grateful. Blood is thicker than water. I'll tell my story in a word," and Ivan proceeded to relate the deed by which he had placed Ursus in his everlasting debt.

"The Countess will see that Ursus sleeps tonight," he finished. "I gave full directions in my note. She has accepted everything."

Daroski looked uneasy. "If you have been watched——"

"I have eluded Dragine and all his minions!" broke in Panine. "I brought my brain back from Siberia. Think you that I would die there whilst Catherine lives? My dear Paul, this night you get beyond her clutches, you and the beautiful Xenia. A disguise that baffles Orloff and Potemkin is safe, don't you think?"

"It ought to be," admitted Paul.

"Ursus will see and hear nothing tonight. He won't even hear the clock of St. Isaac's."

"But there may be a rear guard?"

A grim smile came over Panine's face.

"There was," said he, lowering his voice. "But the girl killed him."

"The girl?"

"A little thing with a tiny dagger. Ah, these little bees sting the hardest."

"But what about the horses?" queried Paul.

"They are ready. I shall handle the lines myself. Come, now, let us drink to the success that will crown our plans."

The exile rose and crossed the poorly furnished room to a sideboard in the wall. Taking from the recess several glasses and a bottle, he returned to the table. Paul, without a word, watched him pour wine into the goblets and then caught his eye.

"Who is the third glass for?" he asked.

"It is the elixir of death."

"What?"

"The draught of eternal oblivion, my dear Paul," and Panine took a small pellet from his pocket and dropped it into the glass.

"It is the emergency drink," and his wan face was illumined by a smile.

"Listen, Paul," Panine went on. "If we should be surprised here, which is not at all likely, for the girl is on guard, we must choose between the mines and glory. You understand?"

"Yes," answered Paul.

Ivan, the exile, lifted his glass and held it for a moment between his face and the light. At that moment of dead silence the door behind them was burst open, and Dreva stood white-faced in the middle of the room.

"They have come!" cried the girl.

The lifted glass fell from Panine's hand and was shattered at his feet.

"It is Levan, the fox!" Dreva went on. "Show him in."

Ivan Panine was now the personification of coolness. There was a light in his eye which Paul had never seen before. The young girl turned back and vanished. In another second the two men heard her voice.

"You seek my friend?" the girl was saying. "This way, Captain Levan."

Into the room stalked the little spy of the imperial police.

"Why, good night, Captain," said Panine, in the coolest of tones. "We were just going to drink the health of her imperial majesty. You shall join us."

"I cannot, Ivan Panine," was the stiff reply. "I have come to arrest you as a fugitive from Siberia."

"Yes, yes, my dear Captain. I thank you for a few days of liberty. I found the mines dark and cold. One shivers across the frontier. He misses the society of St. Petersburg. So I am to go back to the old drudgery? Well, I still call Catherine merciful. This is my friend Paul Daroski. Captain Levan of the police, my dear Paul."

Paul bowed, wondering at Panine's coolness.

"I will go with you in a moment," Ivan continued. "I had just filled our glasses. That one is yours, Captain Levan. I'll get another. It's better wine than I got across the border."

He brought another glass to the table and filled it from the bottle.

"Now here's a health to the great Catherine!" he cried, picking up his glass. "May she live long and prosper!"

Levan reached out and lifted the poisoned goblet. A mujik at heart, he drained its contents at a single gulp.

"Sit down, my dear Captain," said Panine, with the leer of an arch fiend. "You'll be dead in five minutes. That draught was poisoned!"

Already Levan's knees were shaking under him. His face lost every vestige of color, and the last thing he saw was the devil glare in Ivan's eyes.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PLOT THAT FAILED.

THE great clock of St. Isaac's struck in sonorous tones, and all St. Petersburg heard. From fort to fort the cry "All's well!" echoed far and wide, penetrating the many white palaces that stood on the banks of the cold Neva, and telling the poor who cowered in their shambles that Catherine's grip was still on the land.

Within the Carloff palace but few lights were seen. On the step stood Ursus, the giant Cossack, but apparently asleep. He was keeping his word with Xenia, for that word was as good as his bond.

A sleigh without bells glided up to the rear of the palace. A muffled man held the reins steadily and from beneath his head-furs a pair of keen eyes peeped out eagerly. Paul's sweetheart was making ready for the long journey which would end beyond the power of the great Empress. She flitted hither and thither, taking this and leaving that. Her wonderful jewels had been packed and her wardrobe had been gone over with the utmost care. Paul was to meet her in the environs of the city, and Ivan Panine was to rush her thither in the sleigh. Perhaps Ursus heard, but he made no sign. He was like a post without ears and eyes.

When everything was ready, Xenia took a farewell tour through the palace and opened a door which led to the rear stair. Her heart was in her throat, but hers was the determined will of her ancestors. It was flight or doom.

As she reached the bottom step, which was the last thing she would press in the palace, she paused and drew back. Her face grew ghastly pale. At that moment three men sprang from somewhere and were at the horses' heads.

"Merciful Heaven!" gasped Xenia.

She saw Panine dragged from the sleigh and throttled by rude hands. There was no mistaking what it all meant. The Empress's watchdogs had found him out.

As one of the men turned toward the palace itself, Xenia drew back into the shadows. She could not have uttered a sound if she had tried. Terror seemed to freeze her blood. Panine was caught, the plot exposed, and she was still Catherine's prisoner!

Back into the palace she went, her limbs almost giving way beneath her. The lights seemed to dance before her eyes like whirling dervishes.

"Have they captured Paul?" she asked herself under her breath. "Will he fall into the hands of the monster, Dragine? Why cannot he be warned?"

To think was to act. Still disguised, she ran to the front portal and laid her hands on the door. To escape by the back entrance would throw her into the hands of the men who had seized Ivan. There was no way out but past Ursus. What if the man would throw off his mask of helpfulness? What if once more he was Catherine's slave?

"I'll test Ursus," rushed through Xenia's brain, and with this she opened the door and stepped out.

No one, not even the Cossack, was in sight. Xenia drew her cloak tighter about her form and dashed into the street. She knew where Paul was to meet the sleigh. It was a long run, but she did not hesitate. Thoroughly conversant with the route to the meeting place, she hastened away. A prayer for success never left her lips.

When near the spot she paused and looked around. The street seemed deserted. A large cathedral stood at the cross streets, and within its shadow Paul was to meet her. Xenia thought she descried a figure in one of the outer alcoves, and with a little cry, she bounded toward it.

"Paul!"

"Xenia!"

He reached out his hands and took her to his bosom.

"You here alone, dearest?" he cried, with his lips close to hers. "Where is Ivan?"

"In the hands of the secret police."

"My God!"

"I have come to warn you," cried Xenia, looking up into his white face. "They will be here next, the bloodhounds of the Empress. They must not find you, Paul."

"Nor you, girl."

"I care not for myself," she answered. "I can go back to the palace and face my fate."

"Would to Heaven this Russian serpent were here now!" came in a hiss from Paul. "I'd rid Russia forever of its royal Messalina."

"No, no," said Xenia, cowering next to his beating heart. "We will face the tempest. What was that?"

The sound that fell upon her ears caused her to turn with a sudden start. Paul encircled her waist with one hand and with the other drew his sword.

"They shall not take you," she heard him say. "Without you, Xenia, life is a waste as flowerless as Siberia. I can meet the ruffians. I am not afraid of

Catherine's minions. I——"

She caught his sword arm and resolutely beat it down.

"It is not the hunters, thank Heaven," she breathed. "Only a company of merry maskers going home from a revel."

With rising hope they drew back into the stone niche and watched the boisterous group. Neither spoke again till all had passed.

"Go back to your abode," said Xenia. "I will return to the palace. Ursus was true to his pledge. Some day I will reward the giant."

"If Catherine doesn't send him to the eternal snows," smiled Daroski.

He pressed his lips to hers and saw her flit away.

"This crowned courtesan will some day reach the end of her tether," he hissed, as the flying figure vanished. "So they have caught Panine? I wonder who betrayed us; but Dragine has a thousand eyes and never sleeps. God go with you, my love! We will hope for brighter days," and with this he bounded from his place of concealment and was gone.

With the cunning of her sex, Xenia made her way back and once more entered her palace. A glance from the window showed her the grim figure of Ursus, the Cossack, on the steps. The plot for escape had failed.

Xenia restored her gems to their cases and her garments to their wardrobes. Then she sat down and thought. What would be the next adventure? If Catherine were informed of the intended flight, how would she next strike?

The beautiful Countess was still buried in thought when she heard the heavy door of the palace swing open, and the next minute she was looking into the face of a woman well known to all St. Petersburg, the Princess Dragonoff. This woman was beautiful, but soulless, the tool of Gregory Orloff, and therefore in the pay of Catherine.

As she came forward, a flash lit up her dark eyes and she seemed to read the young Countess's soul.

I have come to keep you company. 'Tis the will of our great Empress," said the Princess. "I trust we shall get along famously," and without more ado she cast off her rich wraps and cooly seated herself in an armchair. "It is quite cold abroad, my dear Countess," she went on. "I fear I shall take a chill. Will you not order something heating for my blood."

Xenia, beating down her indignation at the woman's audacity, rang for a servant, and bade him bring the Princess wine. When it came she watched her unwelcome guest pour it out and help herself. Her blood rushed to her fingers' ends. How she longed to throttle this titled spy in Catherine's livery. How she itched to spring upon her and leave her senseless on the floor.

"My dear Countess," pursued Dagonoff, smacking her lips over the costly vintage, "isn't it time you should think of marriage?"

Xenia grew red and white by turns.

"Your single blessedness has of late been much discussed at court. Each one of us has picked out a husband for you."

"Just as if I am not capable of picking a husband!" flashed Xenia.

"No one doubts your capability," said the Princess, refilling her glass. "I will let you into a little secret, my adorable friend." She leaned toward Xenia, who with difficulty held herself under control. "Our good Empress has chosen a husband for you."

"For me?"

"Yes. She is ever solicitous for the welfare of her subjects. She is the Good Mother of all Russia. And the husband whom she has chosen for you is one of the greatest in the realm."

"Ah!"

The exclamation came without effort from the Countess Carloff.

"Just think of it, my fair friend," and for the third time the Princess went after the wine. "In Colonel Poniatowski——"

"What, that infamous Pole!" broke in Xenia, springing to her feet and centering her flashing eyes upon her new guard. "Dare you tell me, Princess, that the Empress would unite me to that beast? I will not listen. I will not consider him for a second. He has abandoned his country and sold his sword to the Empress——"

"But he is rich," smirked the Princess.

"All the wealth of Golconda could not gloss that brute," and Xenia stood erect with clinched hands. "The wine is yours, woman. Drink all of it," and the Countess swept majestically out of the room.

CHAPTER VII.

DREVA'S SECRET.

WHEN Xenia Carloff closed the door upon the Princess Dragonoff, she more than ever realized that hers was the Palace of Doom. That the wine-loving Princess had been set to watch her by her royal rival, the great Empress, there was not the shadow of a doubt. Catherine was resolved that Paul Daroski should be hers, and that she would finally bend him to her will, despite the love he bore the Countess.

It pained Xenia to know that Ivan Panine had fallen into the hands of the merciless police, and she doubted not that his old sentence would be revived against him and the icy doors of the North would again open for him.

In one of the halls of the palace she encountered her faithful maid, who, alarmed at the expression that overspread her countenance, drew back at sight of her.

"Do I show my concern, Magda?" asked Xenia.

"My lady is pale——"

"And why not, pray? My palace has been invaded, and I have left her lest I crush her head."

The girl was unable to speak.

"Wait! She will tarry long at the wine," smiled Xenia. "Dragonoff loves nothing better than a bottle when she does not pay for it. Do you take her more, Magda. I will rest a little."

The maid hurried to the Carloff cellars, and, selecting a bottle of the costliest wine they contained, trooped off with it to the unwelcome guest. Xenia sought her own chamber and threw herself upon a couch.

It galled her to think that the intended flight had been discovered. Everything would have gone well if Ivan had not been taken by the minions of the Empress, but the second blow had fallen, and the fair Countess knew that Catherine was as relentless as a wolf.

Meantime Ivan Panine had been carried into the presence of Dragine, the head of the secret police. He was thrown into a chair without ceremony, his captors trooped away, and he was alone with Count Dragine.

For a moment Catherine's man went on with his writing, but all at once he swept the papers aside and turned upon the Russian.

"So you are back?" said he, a cold smile playing with his thin Muscovite lips.

"Who would not want to come back to his beloved land from the cold of Siberia?" answered Panine.

Dragine looked him over from head to foot.

"It was a pretty game tonight?" said he. "You were embarking on a little journey."

"A little ride, nothing more," said Ivan, pursing his lips.

"And you were not going alone?"

"Not alone, you say?"

"Of course not. Who laid the plot? The Countess Xenia?"

"The Countess had nothing to do with the plot. You behold before you the man who worked it all out."

Dragine was exasperated by the man's coolness.

"Beware!" said he, through his teeth. "I want nothing but the truth, Ivan Panine."

"I have nothing else to give you."

"But the Countess was willing?"

"I have not seen the Countess for hours."

It was a clever evasion of the question.

Dragine drummed for a moment on the edge of the table with his dumpy fingers.

"You didn't like Siberia?" he suddenly asked.

"Who does?"

"Who aided you in your escape?"

"Good fortune."

"What brought you back to St. Petersburg?"

"The same desire that takes the carrier pigeon home."

"I suppose you will write more verses that the Empress does not like?"

"I write at the dictates of the Muses."

Dragine rose and crossed the room, narrowly watched by the man in the chair. He opened a door and spoke a few low words which Ivan did not catch. In a few moments two men entered the room and Dragine pointed to the poet.

"Take him away—you know where," he commanded, and the men advanced.

A sudden impulse drove Panine to his feet. He drew back and threw out his arms.

"Does this mean Siberia?" he demanded.

"You are at the disposition of our Great Mother, the Empress," answered Dragine, coldly.

"Take me to her," cried Ivan. "Let me stand face to face with the Empress Catherine!"

"Away with him!" replied Dragine. "The fool may write more verses, but he shall not throw them at the Empress's feet.

In an hour the two men came back.

"I should have had a report from Levan," said Dragine to them. "Go to Panine's hiding place and see what has become of him."

It was far past midnight when the minions of the empire broke into the exile's retreat and confronted the wild-eyed Dreva, who shivered in their presence.

"Don't grow white, girl," simpered one of the pair. "We are only going to look through the house."

The girl fell against the wall and stared at the intruders.

"In which room was Ivan Panine last?" one demanded.

The girl did not reply. Slowly she was coming back to her senses.

"I know no Ivan Panine," she lied.

"No? The escaped fox masqueraded under another name. It's all the same, my bird. We'll look through the house."

They made to enter a certain room, when, with a cry, Dreva sprang forward and threw herself against the door. Her mien was that of a lioness, and her deep eyes assumed a light which caused the men to halt.

"Stand aside!" cried the spokesman of the pair.

"I will not."

"Aye, but you shall," was the hissed rejoinder. "Here, Alexis, take the thing away. I'll open the door."

The man called Alexis was stronger than Dreva, and, dashing forward, he caught her rudely by the arm. She struggled ineffectually in his grasp and was torn from the door.

"Hold her, Alexis. These little snakes have poison fangs," and with a look at the helpless Dreva he pushed the door inward.

"My God!" he was heard to cry, as he recoiled. "I have found Captain Levan."

Alexis pulled Dreva forward and stared across the threshold. Lying face downward on the floor was the police spy just as he had died from the effects of Ivan's deadly draught. The minion lifted him up and stared into his face. Then in a rage he turned upon the silent girl.

"Who did this?" he demanded.

"Don't ask me," was the reply. "Is it not a visitation from God?"

"More likely the hand of Panine. But we've captured him, and——"

He was interrupted by a shriek from the girl.

"Is Ivan caught?" she cried.

"That he is, my bird."

Dreva would have fallen to the floor if the hand of her captor had not held her up.

"I guess you will talk now," the man went on. "How did Captain Levan die?"

"Let me think."

"Place her in the chair yonder, Alexis, and let her tell us."

Dreva was seated in a chair and watched by the two men. The cause of Levan's death, the deadly glass, still stood on the table, and the girl's eyes wandered slowly to it. She was bracing herself for something desperate, for in the near distance she saw a vision of Siberia.

"I was not here when Levin died," said she, measuring her words.

"Who was?"

"No!" she cried. "You cannot rob me of my secret." The words came deliberately over her lips.

"A secret, is it?" laughed the man.

"My secret."

"Oh, we'll loosen your tongue. I think Count Dragine will find a way. If he should not, how about the Empress?"

"I fear not the Empress."

The twain stared at her incredulously.

"Well, we'll take her away first, Alexis, and then we'll come for Levan."

Dreva left her chair without being molested. They saw her cross the room and open a little door ingeniously set in the wall. All at once she whirled upon her heel and faced them with an outstretched arm, at the end of which was a cocked pistol. The minions of the police recoiled. A smile gathered at the girl's mouth.

"You will go without me," she cried, over the leveled weapon. "Begone!"

Each looked from her into the other's face.

"Go!" she went on. "If you do not want to follow your fellow spy into the everlasting shadows, you will leave at once."

She seemed to advance a step, yet she did not move. The eyes behind the pistol got a new light. The pair shambled rather unceremoniously to the door. She heard their curses of vengeance in the corridor, and when she had shot the bolt she sank into the chair and the weapon dropped from her nerveless hand.

The light flickered and burned low, the girl's bosom rose and fell tumultuously, and on her heart she seemed to feel the merciless winds of Siberia.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE REJECTION.

THE Countess Xenia's lover, Paul, felt that the vengeance of the great Empress would not fall upon him so long as she had hopes of drawing him to her side. Catherine would visit her displeasure upon the fair tenant of the Palace of Doom, and he already had an example of this.

The arrest of Ivan Panine told him that he was deprived of an ally, and he doubted not that the exile would soon be sent back to the land of snow, there to perish miserably among the lightless mines. He might prevent this catastrophe by becoming Catherine's abject slave, but such action meant the abandonment of Xenia, who now more than ever needed his manly love.

To think of this for a single moment was to put it aside, and Paul resolved anew that he would remain true to the Countess, despite the machinations of the ruler of all the Russias. Therefore, when he sought his abode after the discovery of the plot for the escape, he took counsel with himself and nerved himself for the future.

The night after the discovery he found himself confronted by no less a person than Gregory Orloff, who had long been in the Empress's favor. It was the first time this nobleman had ever crossed his threshold. Orloff was accounted the strongest man in Russia, and his feat of

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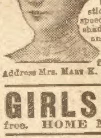

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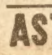

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twisting the heavy silver salver with his bare hands at a ball in the Winter Palace had become known throughout the world. He was as pleasant as a summer morn when he stalked into Paul's presence and graciously accepted a chair.

"My dear Major," began the Count, with a hurried glance around the apartment, "you do not seem to live up to your rank."

Paul smiled.

"I am satisfied," he returned. "My life is simple, and I am well pleased."

"But do you not know that the Empress would have the officers of her guards live well, not to say luxuriously?"

"Catherine, I know, always has the good of her soldiers at heart," Paul answered, divining that Orloff was approaching a certain point. "When we meet our old enemy, the Turk—which meeting I hear is not far distant—we shall exchange our mode of life."

Orloff took a paper from his pocket and leaned back in his chair.

"I am pleased to assure you that you stand high in the Empress's favor," he resumed in his silken tones which he could easily assume when the occasion suited him. "She has seen fit to promote you and——"

Paul raised his hand. "But I have done nothing to deserve promotion," said he. "I am quite content to serve as major."

"But a loyal subject never disobeys his Empress," smiled the insinuating Orloff. "This is a command, my dear Major."

Instantly Paul saw through the trap. The document was thrust almost into his face. He saw the great seal of the empire dangling from it, and a thrill went through his frame.

"Dearly as I love the service of my Empress, I must exact a condition before accepting the new commission."

"What, when what I hold in my hand is a command?"

"Even so, Count."

A smile which had gathered at Orloff's lips instantly vanished.

"What is that condition?" he asked.

Paul knew that the supreme moment of his life had come, one which would have a potent bearing not only upon his own future career, but upon the life of the only woman he loved.

"It is this, my dear Count," he said, watching his visitor closely. "When the espionage that now hems in the Countess Carloff is withdrawn, I shall be glad to exchange a major's epaulettes for a colonel's."

Orloff's face seemed to beam with pleasure.

"You are the first man in Russia to cross the will of the mightiest ruler in the world."

"This is not a question of rank," Paul hastened to say, his determination increasing. "It is a question of the heart."

"But, my dear Major, you should reflect before you give your ultimatum."

"I have reflected. I have weighed the matter from every standpoint. When the Countess Carloff is no longer a prisoner within her palace, I shall obey the Empress."

Orloff rose to his feet and replaced the commission in his pocket.

"I have done my duty. Now comes my report."

Paul's face went quite white.

"It is true, then," continued the Count, "that you are in love with the Countess?" said he.

"I am deeply in love with her."

"But the Countess is in league with an exile."

"Yes?"

"She was on the eve of abandoning the realm."

"Say you so, Count?"

"But for the apprehension of Ivan Panine, she would have escaped against the Empress's wishes."

"And why not?" demanded Paul, looking into the iron face before him.

"The great Empress wants all her subjects to remain."

"What is the Countess's crime?" and Paul's face went red as the words fell from his lips. "What has the gentle Xenia Carloff done to receive the hatred of Catherine?"

"It is enough to know that she planned to quit the country."

Daroski rose to the feet and stood in soldierly attitude before the greatest man in Russia.

"Xenia's fault in the eyes of the Empress is that she loves," he exclaimed. "And what accentuates Catherine's hate is that I am the object of her affections."

"I never inquire into the Empress's reasons," said Orloff. "It is my duty to obey her as a soldier should. I am an Orloff, my dear Major."

"And I am one who cannot spurn the love of the gentlest woman in the world."

"Then you refuse to accept the proffered promotion?"

"Without the acceptance of the imposed condition," and Paul's lips met firmly.

"That is all."

There was a hauteur about the giant Count that boded Paul no good.

"I have fulfilled my duty," resumed the Count, moving toward the door. "As I have said, you are the first soldier of the empire that has rejected the Empress's favors. Adieu."

In another moment the heavy tread of Orloff was heard on the outer stair. Paul listened to it with a smile on his lips.

"Now for claws outside the velvet," thought he. "Now for the next stroke from the throne."

In the meantime Orloff was rushing away in his sleigh toward the Winter Palace. That the interview had terminated as he wished was seen in the expression that seamed his haughty face.

He had feared that the young soldier might accept the proffered promotion and thus break the hold he had long had on the great Empress. Now that Paul had rejected the royal favor, he knew that he (Orloff) would remain secure in his station, and he would see that Catherine did not stay the avenging hand.

Not long thereafter he entered the presence of his ruler. Catherine, who was fondling a lapdog, threw the little animal to the floor and greeted him with a smile.

"You have returned soon, my dear Count," were her first words. "I have been a little impatient."

"It is a soldier's duty to be prompt," was the answer, and Orloff helped himself to some wine from a golden flagon on the gilded table in the middle of the room.

"Reward my curiosity," continued Catherine, impatiently. "You saw Major Daroski?"

"I have just quitted his abode."

"And he graciously accepted my favor?"

Orloff drew the commission from his bosom and cast it upon the table.

"What!" exclaimed Catherine, reddening to the temples. "Does he refuse?"

"He accepts upon one condition, your majesty."

"And that is——"

"That the Countess Carloff shall be at liberty to come and go as she wills."

The imperial lips curled most scornfully. "He dictates to his Empress?" cried Catherine.

"It is nothing less than dictation," was the reply. "He would not even read the commission."

"And this woman, this creature of noble blood, stands between him and happiness."

"He is in love with the Countess Carloff."

Orloff saw the hands in Catherine's lap clinch and her face grow pale.

"This man may strain my mercy to the breaking point," came from her lips in a hiss. "He doubts my power."

"Not that, your majesty, so much as he would deliberately thwart your will."

"I know all, my dear Count. I know of the attempted flight to the frontier, the arrest of her accomplice, the murder of Levan in Ivan Panine's den, the wiles of this woman who sets herself against me. What, stay my hand? Let this be my answer!" and, seizing the commission, Catherine tore it into bits and threw them in a white shower at the Count's feet. "Leave me," she went on, with an imperious wave of her hand. "I would be alone," and when the door had closed on the giant Russian, Catherine in uncontrollable rage hissed one word:

"Siberia!"

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* * *

The Explanation.

The old farmer was making his usual weekly call on Mrs. Wiggins.

"P'taters is good this mornin', madam," he said, casting an admiring look at the basketful he had brought.

"Oh, is they?" retorted Mrs. Wiggins. "That reminds me. I wants to have a word with you about them you sold me last week. How is it that them at the bottom o' the basket is so much smaller than them at the top?"

"Come about like this," replied old John, a knowing look on his face. "P'taters is growin' that fast now, that by the time I get a basketful dug the last ones is about twice the size of the first!"

* * *

His Discovery.

'Rastus had lost his girl. She had "gone with a handsomer man." Meeting her on the street one day, he accosted her thus:

"Look here, 'Liza, does that other fellow give you any bettah presents than I used to give you?"

"Don't know as he does," replied Eliza calmly.

"Does he show you any bettah times than I used to show you?"

"Don't know as he does."

"Does he buy you any bettah dinners than I used to buy?"

"Dinners, man!" exclaimed 'Liza. "Why, that man found appetite on me I didn't know I had!"

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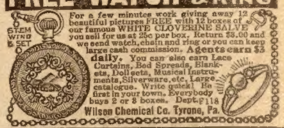

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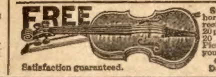

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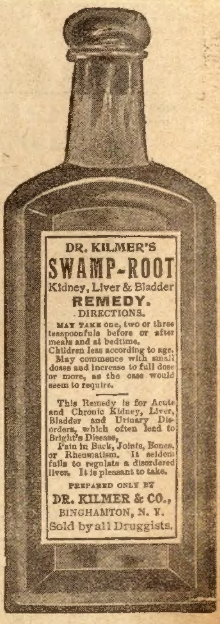

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CHAPTER XII.

NATHAN AT THE GRUNDY HOUSE.

DARKNESS had settled over the landscape when Nathan started out to continue his detective work of the night before. A nervousness—something like a dread—tormented him, but he had no thought of turning back. To him his duty was too plain for any hesitation. Carefully, as on the previous occasion, he traversed the road leading to his destination. He again found his place of concealment behind the clump of bushes.

The waiting seemed more prolonged than on the night before. He had about decided the three would not vacate the house that night, and was preparing to creep away, when he heard a slight noise as of a door being opened. In a minute three persons were rapidly walking away from the house. Now that the hour for action had arrived. Nathan fairly trembled with excitement.

The three hurried in the same direction taken the night before, but he heard no voices, as all remained silent. The watcher, however, felt certain one was Jane Grundy in her disguise as a man. To make sure they were well on their way, or that there would be no unexpected return for something overlooked, Nathan remained cowering behind the bush for a quarter of an hour after the trio had disappeared into the darkness. Then he crept to the house and tried the door. It was locked, as he expected to find. It was a common lock, and a trial of a half-dozen keys only was necessary until one unlocked the door.

Now that the door was unfastened, he hesitated to open it. A man's home is his castle, and he was invading this stronghold. His sense of decency and fairness was shocked, and what he was about to do seemed almost heinous. But he was not entering this domicile as a thief in the night, because he intended to purloin the most trifling article; it was to further the ends of justice—to convict criminals. If the search was fruitless in its results, then no harm would be done to any one. Some may criticise his reasoning, but he convinced himself, which is the only point we have to do with just now, and opened the door. For a minute he stood and listened intently.

He believed the house to contain no human being but himself at that moment, but it might be possible he was mistaken. He entered on tiptoe and softly closed the door. Whether he was alone or not, he was an intruder and felt this keenly, He had to think of his motive in this undertaking to muster up confidence and boldness for the work in hand. He flashed a light around the room, which disclosed the windows covered with heavy paper curtains. As he found this to be the case in all the rooms, it enabled him to use the light more freely than he otherwise would, for the flashes might attract undesirable attention outside. The room he was in undoubtedly was used as a livingroom. There was but little furniture, and untidiness and disorder were evident in every direction.

Nathan did not expect to find anything of an incriminating nature in this room; therefore his observations were soon over. The room he next entered was probably dignified with the name "parlor," but it was scantily furnished and no sign of order could be seen. He made a more careful examination of this apartment, but found nothing to excite his interest. The pantry came next, with a similar result, also the squalid kitchen. The bedroom, probably occupied by the man and wife, was the last one to be investigated on this floor. There was the same scanty furnishing characteristic of the whole house, and a medley of old clothes and boxes. One of the latter articles was utilized as a dresser, and over the top were scattered several small boxes of various kinds. The investigator removed the covers from some of these to expose their contents. As he opened the last, he nearly cried out with what he saw. It was Pearl's watch and chain. He surely would know these two articles anywhere. If there was any doubt, her name was engraved inside. Eagerly he opened the case and found the expected inscription. The first big clew to the mystery of the Cedar had been revealed, he felt sure. With no compunctions whatever, he placed the valuables in his pocket—after his lips had touched them. He was deeply agitated and mechanically pulled his handkerchief from his pocket to wipe his face. In doing so, a stub of a pencil fell unnoticed to the floor.

Almost in a daze he mounted the narrow stairway to explore the upper portion of the house. From all appearances, it was Sam's bedroom he entered first. He made a careful survey of the attic chamber, but nothing particularly struck his attention—only dirt and confusion. The next room must have been Bessie's, there was such a contrast between it and the rest of the Grundy establishment. While everything was now in disorder, there was an unmistakable air of cleanliness still noticeable in the apartment. There surely was no use spending time here looking for incriminating evidence. Thus thinking, he was about to turn away, when his eyes lit upon an old school notebook lying upon a neatly covered box used for a stand. A thought flashed through his brain, and he quickly secured the book. As he opened it and glanced through a few pages, he knew the writer of the note left under his door that never-to-be-forgotten night was Bessie.

By this time he was scarcely in a condition to continue a careful, systematic search. He had preserved the warning note, and wishing to be more certain, if possible, by comparison, he rolled the book up and forced it into one of his pockets. There were two other small garret rooms, both filled with a variety of odds and ends, but he felt it would take too long and be unproductive of any results to go over all this. He descended the stairs and was in the livingroom again.

In the darkness he stood and pondered. What were the net results of his investigation so far? The watch and chain might mean much or comparatively nothing. It might be possible some of the Grundys had found the watch that morning where the cloak was afterward discovered. Why did they not take the cloak? If they had, it was preposterous to think of Jane Grundy wearing it—if for no other reason, the cloak would be recognized. For this reason, also, they would not dare to offer it for sale. When the watch was taken, why was not the cloak at least concealed or destroyed? It must be because they wished suspicion to be directed toward him. Why should they desire this if they were innocent of everything but finding and secreting the watch? He was conscious of having aroused their enmity in no way.

On the other hand, supposing they were guilty of the abduction and death of Pearl. Why should they choose her as a victim? They must know she would be liable to have but little or no money upon her person. Were they after her rings and watch? They could scarcely dispose of these without detection. For this reason, probably, the three highwaymen had never taken any such articles from their victims. They had always left the assaulted person after taking what money could be found. Why should they carry Pearl away and murder her? Now that he knew one of the three highwaymen was Jane Grundy, the awful thought that had often come to him seemed out of the question. No matter how low and degraded the woman was, she surely would not be an accomplice in this way for her husband and son. It would simply be entirely foreign to human nature, even with a woman who had such a devil nature as she. Guilty or not guilty of the murder of Pearl, there were mysteries connecting the Grundys with the tragedy.

And how much did Bessie know about some of these things? What had become of her? Strange she should remain silent now that she was entirely away from her former bondage. It seemed as if she would drop a line to John Worker, surely. He had seen the young man the day before and he still was in the dark. Could it be possible that the Grundys had intercepted Bessie in her escape, and now had her in confinement? If so, where was the place of her imprisonment?

Busy with his troubled thoughts, he stood in the darkness of the livingroom. How long he had thus pondered, he did not know, but at last he sensed a peculiar, monotonous sound coming to his ears. When he fully realized this, he instantly strained every nerve at attention. What he heard seemed so low, and try as hard as he might, he could not locate the direction of what appeared to be a faraway voice. An instinctive bowing of the head came to him, for it seemed to be the tones of prayer. Surely nothing of the kind was wont to be made in the Grundy house! But how about the hymn he had heard twice outside? Was this the voice of Pearl coming to him again? He tried to force his ears to take in more of the voice. It was too very low—so low, in fact, that he wondered if it was not all an auditory illusion. He could not accept this explanation. Did it come from outdoors? It hardly seemed so. It did not seem to come from inside the house. Was it from the cellar? He could not locate the tones as proceeding from thence.

The thought of the cellar gave him a shock of surprise. This part of the premises had been entirely overlooked in his investigation. Was it possible Bessie was confined there, and it was her voice in a prayer to God for succor that he heard? He must satisfy himself at once. For the moment the thought of what else the cellar might contain did not enter his mind.

It took him a minute or two to find an entrance to this lower region. His flashlight showed a door leading from the pantry, and this was probably the right opening. Just as he reached out his hand to raise the latch, he heard voices outside the house.

Time had sped by while he was investigating and putting in time buried in thought over perplexing problems. The Grundys were returning. The next instant he heard their steps upon the porch.

CHAPTER XIII.

"LIKE A RAT IN A TRAP."

AS NATHAN heard the Grundys—for he was right in supposing it to be they—step upon the porch, his first impulse was to plunge down the stairs into the cellar. But he instantly realized he would be penned in and probably discovered. He quickly glided through the livingroom and the kitchen into a rough entrance room to the latter. The space was nearly filled with a variety of trash, leaving scarcely more than a path to an outside door. This was fastened by an inside bolt. Drawing this back, he was quickly outside, just as the Grundys stepped through the front door. Quietly closing his means of egress, he hastened away from the house. It was not long until he was back in his own cabin.

Nathan did not feel at all satisfied with the results of his night's work. He had found no real evidence that the Grundys were the three highwaymen of the city, or that they were the murderers of Pearl. True, he had found the watch and chain he knew to be hers, but it was possible they had found the valuables. That Bessie was the writer of the note of warning, he now was certain, and this made it more than ever important to locate her. Perhaps the cellar held the key to several mysteries. If he had not stood there in the old livingroom and put in so much time dreaming when he ought to have been at his explorations! After tossing about restlessly for over an hour, he fell asleep.

The next day he forced himself to his work in the river. Nothing whispered to the clam digger that this was the last day in which he would follow this occupation. If he had had a premonition of the events of the next twenty-four hours, the worker would have been in a far more unsettled nervous condition than he was contending against as he splashed around in the water.

As the day wore on, he settled firmly in his mind that he would explore the cellar of the Grundy house that night.

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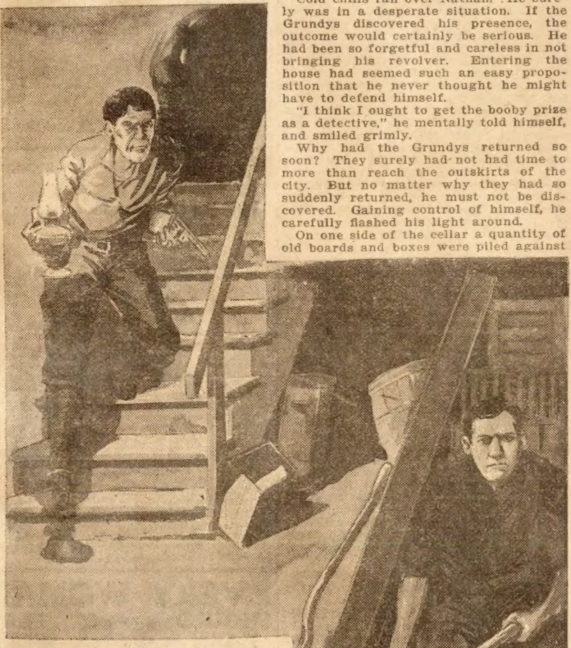
Anxious for the time to arrive, the day seemed long. Clouds obscured the sky, and by the middle of the afternoon a slow rain set in. Soon after, Nathan quit his work and climbed up the river bank —and his clam-digging days were ended. At his cabin he changed his wet garments, ate an early supper, then impatiently waited for darkness.

As night approached, the rain continued to fall. This brought a new worry to Nathan, for this kind of weather might keep the Grundy's at home. But it was just the kind of night for footpads, he thought encouragingly. With this idea in mind, he was watching from behind the clump of bushes considerably earlier than upon the two previous evenings.

The wait seemed half the night. The rain fell in a monotonous drizzle as he stood or squatted behind the bush. At last he heard the door open and a shuffling of feet on the porch.

Naturally, it was darker than upon the two previous occasions in which he had watched the house. It was hard to distinguish the figures as they stepped from the porch and started away. Then they took a direction leading farther from the bush than they had followed before. The three were surely together, but tonight they walked close side by side. Nathan vaguely wondered at this, but soon they had disappeared into the darkness, and he knew it was time for action. Waiting only a minute longer, he was at the door. He quickly unlocked it and stepped inside. He carefully relocked the door; for he had worked his brain in an effort to remember whether he had done this or not the night before. No sound came to his ears as he stood and listened for a moment. He entered the pantry and opened the door leading into the cellar. With the aid of his flashlight, he descended the steps.



Lamp in hand he came down the steps.

Flashing his light around, he peered in every direction. It was a good-sized cellar walled with rough stones. Barrels, boxes, and rubbish of all sort were piled around in confusion. His heart began to beat faster as he noticed the only free passage through the miscellaneous assortment led from the foot of the stairway he had descended to a door in the side of the wall. Was it an outside cellar door? He flashed his light to the opposite side of the room and saw a door that was surely such an opening. It was blockaded with a variety of material and evidently had not been used for months. He remembered noticing this outside entrance the afternoon he made his call upon the Grundy family.

It came to him what was at least the original purpose of this inside door. Several years before the whole country was exercised over the frequency of destructive tornadoes. Many "cyclone caves" were built—some away from the dwelling, others opening directly from the cellar. This was a refuge of the latter description. But did it now answer some other purpose?

Nathan stepped to the door. It seemed to have been recently repaired to make it more solid and secure. A padlock hung in a strong staple for the evident purpose of locking. Why was this? His first thought had been that he had discovered where Bessie was confined, but the door was unfastened. Tingling with excited curiosity, he opened the door.

It was a small room built up with rock and arched overhead. The floor was covered with brick laid flat. It was a well-constructed cyclone cave, the arched ceiling being three or four feet below the surface of the ground. With the strong door and padlock it would make a secure dungeon for a prisoner. Had it been used for this purpose?

An old chair stood in one corner, and in another a couple old quilts were thrown into a pile. Had some occupant of the cave used these things recently? The walls were damp and a trifle moldly. Large cracks at the bottom and the top of the door were the only means of ventilation. It would be a miserable place of confinement. Had Bessie been a prisoner here? If so, where was she now? Instead of solving a mystery, the problem was becoming more complex.

Well, there was nothing more to investigate, and he might as well leave the house and try to decide upon a future course of action. He turned to retrace his steps up the stairway, but the next instant stood as if petrified. There were steps upon the porch, and in a moment the front door was opened. By the voices he knew the Grundys had returned.

Cold chills ran over Nathan. He surely was in a desperate situation. If the Grundys discovered his presence, the outcome would certainly be serious. He had been so forgetful and careless in not bringing his revolver. Entering the house had seemed such an easy proposition that he never thought he might have to defend himself.

"I think I ought to get the booby prize as a detective," he mentally told himself, and smiled grimly.

Why had the Grundys returned so soon? They surely had not had time to more than reach the outskirts of the city. But no matter why they had so suddenly returned, he must not be discovered. Gaining control of himself, he carefully flashed his light around.

On one side of the cellar a quantity of old boards and boxes were piled against the wall. Carefully working along, he found a triangular space between the lumber and the masonry. On his hands and knees he quietly backed into this place of concealment. He would remain there until the family retired, then he would attempt to leave the house. In the meantime, if any one should enter the cellar, he hoped his presence would not be observed.

He had scarcely ensconced himself when the door at the head of the stairway was opened, and lamp in hand some one came down the steps. The person—for Nathan could not see who it was—entered the cyclone cave for a moment, then came out and held the lamp aloft as if taking a view of the stock in the cellar. He then returned to the floor above, while the concealed intruder breathed a sigh of relief.

"Nothing down there we need to bother with," Nathan heard Bill Grundy remark, as he closed the door at the head of the stairs.

The man in the cellar could not distinguish the words above, only at times when the voice was raised. But he recognized the tones, and soon became convinced that Sam was not one of the speakers. The third member of the family had not returned with the other two. Was there anything peculiar about this?

The two above seemed to be strangely active. They walked quickly across the floor and from one room into another. Several times one or both ascended and descended the stairs leading to the attic. For an hour this activity continued, and Nathan wondered what it all meant. Why didn't they retire?

If anything, their hurry seemed to increase at the end of an hour. After a half-hour more, Nathan heard a door close, and all was still. Was it the front door? No steps sounded on the porch. Was it the bedroom door? It would seem as if some stir would be noticed as the two prepared for bed. Was it the back door? It might be possible. What were the Grundys up to? What had developed during the night? Above, the old domicile was as silent as the grave.

If they had left the house, perhaps they would suddenly return again, as they had nearly two hours before. This thought kept Nathan in hiding for another hour. Then he slowly crept from his cramped quarters and stood erect.

It would not be long until it would be daylight. If the couple were in bed, it was time to make the attempt to slip away. If they were out of the house, they were liable to return at any moment. So, in any event, his departure must be made at once.

He softly ascended the stairs and opened the door into the pantry. On tiptoe he slowly ventured into the livingroom.

CHAPTER XIV.

BETTIE PLAYS EAVESDROPPER.

WHEN Henry Ames and Sam Gundy entered the restaurant in Marshalltown, the evening was well spent and business was practically over. Sam did not glance at the waitress at the farther end of the room, and Henry caught only a fleeting glimpse as she quickly turned and entered the kitchen of the establishment. She was trembling and a pallor was plainly visible upon her face.

"I am not well," she informed one of the other girls.

"I should say!" responded that individual. "You had better go to your room and I will see that you are excused."

"Thank you," Bettie gratefully acquiesced, as she left the room.

Entering her chamber she sat down upon the bed, and in a few minutes all traces of her previous agitation had disappeared. A girl who dropped in to offer any needed assistance was relieved to find that nothing serious seemed to be in evidence.

"Go to bed and you will be all right in the morning," she urged, as she left Bettie for the night.

"I wonder why they are together?" was the question Bettie whispered, and the worried lines upon her brow showed this was not easy to answer.

The meeting on Henry's part had been accidental. A few minutes before their entrance at the restaurant, he was surprised when Sam stepped before him.

"I've been looking all over town trying to get up with you," declared the really unwelcome acquaintance. "I told pap I would know you, although I have not seen you since you left Leadville. Now that I have found you, I want to get a supper, and then I must talk to you," he finished.

When first accosted, Henry did not immediately recognize the speaker, but at the mention of the Colorado City recollection came. The man from St. Paul had no desire to meet the man from Waterloo, but there seemed to be no help for it. Henry led Sam to the restaurant, and sat in silence while the hungry man ate his meal.

"Where shall we have our talk?" demanded the latter, when he had finished and shoved his chair back from the table.

"I am sure I don't know," listlessly replied Henry. "If we walk out in the suburbs we will be out in this infernal rain, so you had better wait a few hours and then we can keep dry."

"Can't wait," shortly stated Sam. "Don't

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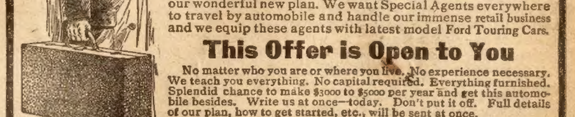

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the boss of this joint have a room we can use for an hour or so?"

"Don't know—will see," tersely replied Henry, as he arose and approached the proprietor.

When the man of victuals learned what was wanted, he kindly offered the use of a vacant apartment upstairs. At present he did not have his full complement of girls, and this room was unoccupied. In a few minutes Henry and Sam were alone behind a closed door. In the adjoining room Bettie had not yet made any preparations for sleep.

"I wanted to see you because the devil is to pay," the girl heard a voice in the next room raised in emphasis. She sprang to her feet and listened intently. She rightly judged a caution was being given to speak in lower tones.

The two rooms were built to be used doubly if occasion required. A door between was fastened with bolts on each side. Bessie knew her side was secured, and probably so was the other. She gazed searchingly at the shield between the rooms, then she sank to her side upon the floor and pressed an ear to a crack at the bottom.

"I tell you pap and mam have got scared and we have got to git," she heard plainly.

"How so, Sam?" and she knew the question was asked by Henry Ames.

"It's this way," and Sam's voice dropped still lower, but the listener understood—thanks to her acute sense of hearing. "We were out on a little trip last night. When we got home, we found a stub of pencil upon the floor, and mam says it is not ourn. When we got back we found the front door unlocked, but we thought we might have been careless when we left. But the back door had the bolt drawn. All this looked funny. Then mam found that the watch Pearl Ames used to have was missing. Mam may have put it in some darn safe place where she has forgotten, but she declares it is no such thing. She says she is just as positive as she ever can be that she put it in a little box in her bedroom. She has searched high and low, but no watch. Some one has been in our house, and the devil knows what has been found out."

"What is there to be found out?" asked Henry. "Are there some things laid away that you have found on your night trips?" There was undoubted sarcasm in the tone.

"No, we are not afraid of that. We never bring back anything that will give us away."

"Then why are you scared?"

"Because—because," and Sam was plainly at a loss for a reply. "There's Pearl Ames' watch." He caught at this explanation.

"Well, if this comes up, swear you found it by her cloak at Nathan Talbot's boat landing. They won't give you more than thirty days in the lockup—or say you found the watch in the river and were going to take it to the police." Henry chuckled at this.

"Well, pap and mam ain't going to run any risks. They know what they are about. I am going to skin out tomorrow night, and perhaps I am a great big fool not to do so before—but I will risk one more day." Sam was now pacing back and forth in the narrow confines of the bedroom. At last he stopped, and Bettie felt that it was before Henry Ames.

"It makes no difference whether you think we have cause to be alarmed or not. We are badly scared, and we believe we have good reasons. Pap and mam leave tonight, and they will not stop to take anything, hardly, with them. All their stuff at home must be left behind. They have precious little money to go on. All this comes because you drove us into making away with Pearl Ames. Pap says you say it was work all thrown away. You've told him how. This may be all true, but it has got us in a terrible mess—and me worse than all. I won't explain, but these are facts. Now, are you going to help us out of this affair? Pap and mam will pass through here before morning. I want you to give them money enough so they can run to cover. Pap says there is no use in me coming to you in our trouble, but I am here all the same. What do you say?" Sam waited for an answer.

"I don't know as I can say more than I told Bill," and Henry gave a weary sigh. "I don't doubt but that you fellows need money badly, whether you have reasons to run or not. If you guess right, I surely wish I could help you get away. But my cash is nearly gone for the month, and I must shortly get back to St. Paul to wait until next month's payment. We—or I, if you want to say it that way—have made a mess of this whole business. I feel, I guess, as bad as you, for I have blundered into another trouble that tears my heart to pieces. Have you ever loved any nice girl and been turned down?"

The question came like a shot. While Henry had been talking a doubting expression rested upon Sam's face, but at the close his twitching mouth and burning eyes startled the questioner.

"That is the reason why I am risking my all by staying behind the folks for a few hours more!" exclaimed Sam, with great vehemence. Gradually a sullen, despondent look came into every feature, and he turned to leave the room.

"Perhaps you are telling me the truth —perphaps you ain't," he said, as he stopped at the door and faced his companion. "I wanted to make a stagger to help pap and mam in their get-away, but if worst comes to worst you may count on being in hell along with us." He swung the door open and closed it behind him.

An oath escaped the remaining occupant of the room, while a more than usual pallor came into the face, and his hands trembled as he lit a cigar.

The listener on the other side of the partition rose to her feet and sought a chair into which she dropped. For half an hour she sat in a deep study. She heard Henry Ames leave the other room, but paid little attention to this.

"I wish I knew what I really ought to do and had the courage to do it," she murmured, in evident perplexity. For the next half-hour she wrestled with the problem which she had dimly comprehended during the last few days, but now light had come, and down deep in her heart she knew there was only one course to pursue.

"There is only one thing to do, and that is to do right," finally came from her lips in a determined whisper, and, now that a momentous action had been definitely decided upon, her whole countenance cleared with relief. She quickly began gathering up her effects and packing them into a grip she pulled from under the bed.

"It is a good thing my belongings are not very numerous upon this occasion," she reflected, as she finished her task and sought her bed.

In the morning the proprietor was surprised when Bettie informed him that business of the utmost importance required her presence elsewhere and she must leave. He never had had help more satisfactory, and was loath to give her up, but while she expressed deep regret, there was no shaking her in her determination. Within an hour she was at the depot ready for the train.

After a sleepless night, Henry Ames determined to make another appeal to Bettie. Entering the restaurant, he was disappointed in not seeing the girl he loved. Consternation seized him when informed by the proprietor of Bettie's departure. Without waiting for a breakfast, he hurried to the depot where he knew a train was about due. He arrived just in time to catch a glimpse of the girl as she mounted the steps of a car. Although a thick veil covered her face, he knew he was not mistaken. He hastily bought a ticket to Oelwein—where several lines of the road centered—and also boarded the train. If she went on to that junction, circumstances would determine his course of action there.

In the smoker rode Sam Grundy. Wrapped in gloomy thought and puffing at a black pipe, he did not know Henry Ames was in the next coach. Thus three of our characters were on this train hurrying forward to a deciding crisis in their lives only a few hours away.

Arriving in Waterloo, without paying attention to any one, Sam hurried to the river. Some distance down the stream a depression of the land occurs where all or part of the river channel used to be in some bygone ages. In the early days of the city, a dam was built across the river just below the opening into this swale and the depression more or less excavated. The mill race thus constructed led to a busy paper mill. One day the paper trust bought the mill and it ceased to be operated. The dam went to destruction—as we noted in the first chapter of our narrative—and the opening to the mill race from the former pond was graded in to form a crossing for a road extending down the river. Some water seeps through the embankment and sluggishly creeps along the old channel. In high water the embankment overflows and sometimes is partially washed out, then the old mill race becomes a roaring torrent.

When Sam reached the grade above the old dam, he plunged down into the ancient water course.

"No telling what may have passed this way that unlucky morning," he muttered. "It is queer I never thought of searching this old place before."

Securing a stick he started along this gully—which is about a hundred rods long. Every portion was closely scanned, and the stick used in the tiny ponds that were scattered along in places. He gradually drew near the site of the former busy factory.

Some of the stone and other material of the building had been hauled away, as wells as some of the machinery. The old paper mill, forlorn, dilapidated, desolate, was, and is, a place for the sightseeing tourist. The bulkhead across the race was gone and an old turbine water wheel leaned against a projecting beam, resting from its labors. Just above this location was one of the tiny ponds. Some boys sat on an old beam fishing, more for the name of the thing than expecting any particular results. Only "small fry" would be the best results from this pool, unless it was soon after a flood from the main channel of the river.

Sam had nearly reached the boys, when one had difficulty in pulling up his line. For some time he tugged, then it began to yield slowly. Something was brought to the surface. For a moment Sam stood spellbound, then he gave a cry something like a snarling tiger pouncing upon his prey, and leaped toward the object which the boy had entangled with his hook and was dragging out of the water.

This capital story will be concluded in the next issue of the Ledger. During the coming months many great stories will appear in these columns. If you are not already a subscriber for this paper, it will repay you to send in a year's subscription. It costs you only $1.00, and you will never regret it. Let us hear from you at once.

* * *

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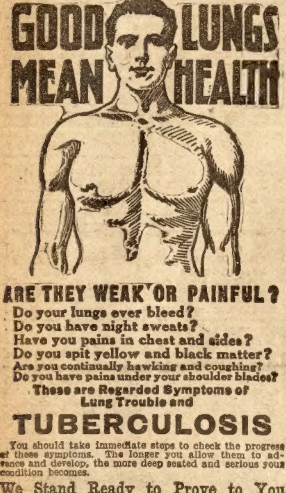

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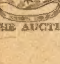

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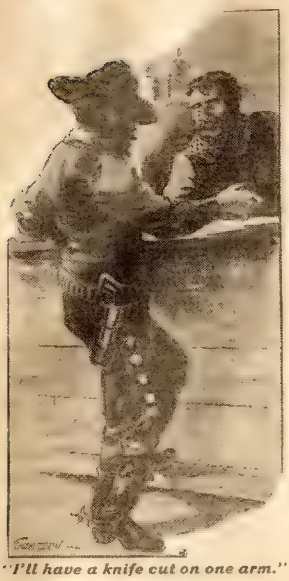
THE RIM ROCK BANDIT

By HAPSBURG LIEBE



"I'll have a knife cut on one arm."

MILES upon miles of canyon-riven plateaus, valleys, and slopes, all arid except for an occasional waterhole; covered with dwarfed cedar, pinon, mesquit, cacti, greasewood, dagger-tree; overrun with coyotes, dog lizards, rattlers, tarantulas and hydrophobia skunks, with now and then a chaparral cock or a bluebird—such a place is the Rim Rock country, away down in the Southwest.

It was at dawn. In the mouth of a canyon on the western edge of the Rim Rock country, a man still slept beside the burned-out ashes of a fire. He was smooth-faced and youngish, a rather big fellow, and the exposed parts of his skin were tanned with a tan that was shallow and bordered with red. His hat covered his eyes, which might have been the reason for his sleeping into the day. His saddle was under his head; nearby lay a pick and a pan, a frying pan, a bag of desert rations, a pair of canteens, and a roll of clothing; a short distance away a calico pony and a lazy pack mule stood picketed. This man was Laramie Foote, college-bred New Yorker. Laramie Foote was looking for gold.

While Foote slept, another man came up, riding a sunburned black horse whose feet made no sound in the sand of the canyon's bed. He was tall and as rawboned as an Indian, with long, straw-colored hair and mustaches, and a pointed straw-colored beard which made him seem much older than he really was. This was Joe Mortimer, adventurer, who had twice been a sheriff up on the Pecos, and once an insurgent leader in Sonora, a man who professed to hate the encroachment of civilization bitterly—and yet he had fought hard for it. And as Joe Mortimer halted by the sleeping Easterner, he suddenly drew a revolver and sent a bullet whining past his ear.

Foote sat up and looked around with an expression of surprise and annoyance rather than of fear. Upon seeing the bearded fellow who sat on his horse silently a few yards away, his right hand began to feel for the new blued forty-five that nestled against his hip.

"What the ——" he said in a low growl, breaking off short as Mortimer interrupted.

"Steady there, friend!" exclaimed the bearded man, smiling a very little and dropping his still smoking weapon into its holster. "Don't make a foolish draw. Ever see a hydrophobia cat, friend?"

Foote stared, and made no answer.

"Look just beyond you, friend."

Foote decided that he could trust this fellow with the twinkling blue eyes and the hairy face. He turned his head and saw, wriggling spasmodically in the sand a few feet away, one of those little animals that are dreaded by the plainsman more than the rattler and the gila of the poisonous bite. He knew then that the stranger had shot, not at him, but at the spotted bit of vermin.

"He was sure makin' for your nose, friend," continued Mortimer, "which is the place they gen'rally pick for."

Foote rose to his feet, and advanced toward Mortimer with his right hand outstretched. Mortimer threw the reins of his sunburned black over the animal's head and dismounted. The two, so widely different in most ways, shook hands, and there began a friendship that has not yet been broken.

Foote made a fire and began to get his breakfast. Mortimer sat upon a bit of black volcanic rock and watched him, smoking a Mexican cigarette and talking.

"And you ain't found enough o' the precious yellow to electroplate a safety pin, eh? Well, well! I reckon there ain't much gold in this here place, though it looks like there ought to be, by the horn spoon it does! And what am I doin' in this here God-forsaken country, did you say? Well, Friend Foote, I'll tell you, and don't be surprised to hear it: I'm after a bandit for the thousand dollars reward that's been offered for him by the last man he robbed."

"A bandit—in here?" questioned Foote, as though he hardly believed it. "Are you sure?"

"I am," answered Mortimer, jerking his head downward. "Now listen, and I'll hand it to you in a few words.

"As maybe you know already, to the west of here the country gets more level, and on this better ground, some four miles away, there stands a little town which is built princ'p'lly of adobe. Its name is Alejandra, it has two stores, one saloon and hotel combined, and a dozen or so of mud houses, about a third of the latter named bein' inhabited by Mexicans. This town is kept in existence, you might say, by three big cattle ranches which run up close to it, the Linked-C, the Crossed-L, and the Double-Diamond, which same is owned by three old men named Crelow, Ledworth, and Duggar. I've heard that they was old minin' pals, and that after striking it rich to the north some'eres they bought land here and set in to makin' big cattlemen out o' themselves. None of 'em ain't never married.

"Well, bein' sort o'miserly, and no banks bein' close, these three old codgers is wont to keep what ready money they've got in their houses. Night afore last a big man with a burlin' brown beard hangin' out from under his mask, and wearin' a noticeably fine pair o' silver-bespangled buckskin chaps, rode—presumably out o' this same Rim Rock country here—up to Credlow's ranch house, and took some ten thousand dollars from Credlow at the p'ints of two big pearl-handled sixes. Credlow then offered a thousand for the capture of this here unknown, who is now called the Rim Rock bandit, and I need the money. Understand, Friend Foote, I ain't no profeshional bad-man hunter, for by the horn spoon I've seen some mighty white bad-men; but this here Rim Rock bandit he robbed an old, old man, and it ain't fair to do that."

"A thousand dollars reward," mused the Easterner. "I could use some of that coin myself, being stone broke. Let's join forces, and split up the reward if we get it—what say, Joe?"

Mortimer smiled whimsically. It was plain that he did not regard this tenderfoot a very capable man in the capacity of hunting outlaws. But he admired the show of spirit, and he decided to appease the eagerness that shone from Foote's sincere gray eyes.

"I've got you," he said. "And by the horn spoon here's hopin'!"

He lifted one of Foote's canteens and took a swallow of water.

"After breakfast," he continued, "we'll ride into Alejandra for news and grub. I'm clean o' grub, Friend Foote, and your pile looks somewhat slim itself."

When they had eaten, the two mounted and rode to the little sun-baked town that lay some four miles from the western edge of the Rim Rock country, Foote's lazy pack mule following sluggishly.

A dozen or so of horses were standing in the narrow hot and dusty street before the Green Owl when they rode up and dismounted. Foote halted at the doorway; he appeared to be afraid of the array of Mexicans and bronzed cowmen who stood against the bar or hovered over the gaming tables. Mortimer put an encouraging hand on his arm, however, and they entered the noisy place.

Now, a stranger, and particularly a man with tenderfoot sticking out all over him, was not by any means a common sight in Alejandra the isolated. Men quit their monte, or set down their glasses, as Foote appeared before them. They began to look him over and over, up and down, as though he was a person from another sphere. Then one over-merry cowman asked in a blubber of laughter:

"Where'd you find it, Joe?"

Mortimer frowned hard at the cowman—so hard, in fact, that the cowman quit laughing. It was plain that Joe Mortimer was held in a sort of respect.

"I met up with my friend Foote here," said Mortimer, in a rumbling growl, "back in the Rim Rock. Foote and me are joining forces to take the bandit."

In spite of the deference in which the cowmen held the adventurer, a roar of laughter went up at the thought of a tenderfoot trying to get a line on the mysterious robber, the man of the silver-bespangled chaps, the big pearl-handled sixes, and the burling brown beard. Foote and his companion were soon the center of a great and unusual interest.

"It's too soon to laugh, boys," said Mortimer, and Foote noted that the tan on his face above the straw-colored beard had gone a little bloodless. "You fellows wait for a few days. I boast that I know a man when I see him, by the horn spoon, I do! I'll gamble that Foote here'll fool you, tenderfoot or no tenderfoot."

"Oh, Tender Foote!" some one bawled

Joe Mortimer seemed not to have heard it. He forced his way to the bar, his new friend following closely.

"Line up, boys," he invited, with a sweep of one of his great brown hands. "The drinks is on me. But as I'm in the last throes o' frenzied finance, I'll have to ask you to hang to the cheap ones. Line up, and drink to the health o' my pal, Laramie Foote."

They lined up and they drank to the health of the Easterner.

Then Mortimer led Foote aside, and told him to amuse himself in the Green Owl until he went to the Crossed-L ranch house and back, adding that one of the cowmen had whispered that old Ledworth wished to see him. Evidently Mortimer had taken it for granted that his vouching for Foote was all the protection the Easterner needed. So Mortimer mounted his sunburned black, and galloped away toward the Crossed-L.

But the adventurer's judgment was not well founded. A tenderfoot was too new to Alejandra, too much of an innovation. Before Mortimer had been gone an hour, the crowd in the Green Owl set upon Foote like hounds upon a deer The air soon began to reek with powder smoke, and Foote was pressingly urged to execute a buck-and-wing for the benefit of the onlookers. He refused stolidly, and a bullet almost cut the toe of one of his boots. Then Foote led out with a straight-arm blow and struck with a terrific force—the wrong man.

The wrong man was the big foreman of the Crossed-L, a huge, brute-like fellow wearing a heavy brown beard. He felt that he had been greatly insulted by Fôote, and he and the Easterner became entangled immediately. Foote threw him by a trick of wrestling, but he was on his feet again in two seconds; he pounded Foote in the chest twice, and received a blackened eye in return. It would be hard to guess what the outcome would have been had not Joe Mortimer arrived and rushed into the thick of it.

"Quit this!" he bawled, and jerked the Crossed-L foreman aside as though that person had been a mere boy. A low growl of disapproval ran through the crowd, and some uncomplimentary language escaped Foreman Lakin's lips. Mortimer went pale.

Then he pointed to Lakin's blackened eye and laughed—and then to Foote's damaged fist, and laughed again.

"I told you," he remarked, "that there was something to this friend of mine. He's the sort that you always catch with his boots on. He ain't the sort to set around with his boots off—that onholy abomination unto the Lord! Le's go, Friend Foote. You might thrash Lakin with your fists, but it would end with gunplay."

The scowls on the faces of the crowd deepened. Joe Mortimer kept his right hand very close to the butt of a revolver. He took Foote's arm in his left hand, and began to lead him backward toward the door. Soon they had mounted their horses, and were riding in the direction of the Crossed-L, with Foote's pack mule following.

"They're afraid of you," said the Easterner, as they rode along under a broiling sun, leaving a thick cloud of dust behind. "Why?"

"Because I always go 'em one better," answered Mortimer. "That big Crossed-L foreman, Lakin—he come near killin' me once. He's a bad one, and no mistake. I told him he was a thief in a poker game; he yanked a six ahead o' me, and poked it in my face. He says to me, 'Mort, say that again!' darin' like. I turned up my nose—although my knees was almost crumplin', friend, and says I, 'I'll not do it!' like a contrary child. I forced a laugh, and that roped his goat. Say, did you know it's awful hard to shoot a man who's laughin'? Well, it is!"

"And Lakin, I see," said Foote, thoughtfully, "wears a beard a little on the order, perhaps, of that worn by the bandit."

(Continued on page fourteen.)

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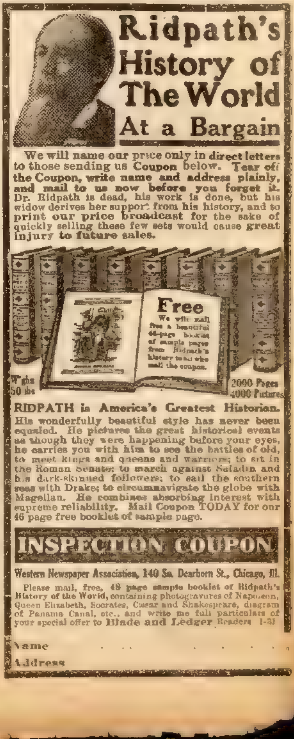

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Inducement.

Mrs. Knicker—"How do you keep your servants?"

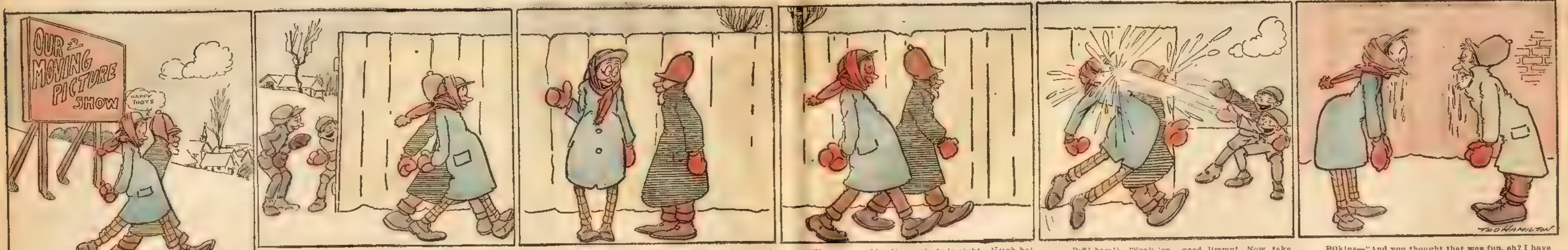
Mrs. Bocker—"I have extra large keyholes in all the rooms."

Undiscovered.

"You know there's more in this world than money."

"I don't know. If there is my wife hasn't thought of it."

IT WAS DIFFERENT NOW



Leonard Looney—"It s too bad, the kids don't have the fun nowadays like we used to have——

"Why, right behind the old fence there we boys used to make snowballs by the armful——

"Then we would pelt everybody in sight. Heigh ho' but them were the happy days

Biff! bam!) "Soak 'em, good Jimmy! Now, take to your heels!"

Bilkins—"And you thought that was fun, eh? I have a notion to smash your face!"

Arranged as a Climax.

"What did your uncle leave you in his will?"

"Three guardians, a lot of advice, and a little money."

Politics.

Stella—"You can rule a man through his stomach."

Bella—"Then it is best to stuff the ballot box"

Not Anxious for Women.

Mr. Upton—"Where's my hat?"

Mrs. Upton—"I declare, I never saw such helpless creatures as men are. Can't move a step without a woman to look after them. A woman can keep track of her own things, the children's, and her husband's, and run a boarding house besides; while a man can't so much as find his hat without making some poor, overworked woman jump up and get it for him. Here's your hat, just where you left it when you came in. On your way downtown, stop at the Daily Allthenews office, and leave this advertisement."

"What's it about?"

"Rooms and board for gentlemen only."

◆

Got His Number.

"I'm sorry to tell you, mum, that I'll be leaving you next week. I'm going to get married."

"That so, Emma? Who is the lucky man?"

"He's a policeman, mum. On this beat, too."

"That's fine. I wish you joy. And what is his name?"

"I don't know yet, mum; but his number is 518."

◆

A Cautious Greeting.

Pat—"That McGinty is a fine fellow."

Mick—"Is he?"

Pat—"He is, indeed. Great friend of mine. He wasn't satisfied wid shaking wan hand."

Mick—"No."

Pat—"He grabbed both my hands—fine fellow—grabbed both my hands."

Mick—"Yis, I suppose he thought his watch and chain would be safer that way."

◆

Not Out of Mind.

Husband (off for a journey)—"Do you often think of me when I am gone?"

Wife—"Indeed I do. It takes me a week to get the smell of smoke out of the house."

Concentrating Her Efforts.

Simpson—"Young's wife is certainly a good manager."

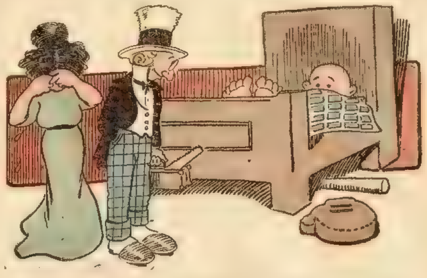
Sampson—"Of household affairs generally?"

Simpson—"No; of Young."

In Style by Accident.

Agnes—"Where did you get the new slit dress?"

Carrie—"It is my old hobble; I got the slit in it stepping from a street car this morning."



Doctor—"Artie doesn't look ill Why do you think he is?"

Mother—"He wanted to study his arithmetic last night, instead of going to the picture show.

The Secret.

Mr. Gazip—"That romantic Miss Passe says there is a secret connected with her birth."

Miss Pickles—"So I've heard. It's the date."

◆

"How is it you can so easily tell a married man in any assemblage?"

"By the way he listens."

Gentle Hint.

Dr. Johnson to the contrary notwithstanding, puns are occasionally excusable. This one, attributed to a boarding-house keeper, is good enough to pass muster.

One of the young men who lived in the boarding-house had the double fault of slowness in paying his bill and fussiness about the table service. One morning he said peevishly to the landlady:

"Mrs. Jones, will you tell me why my napkin is so damp?"

"Yes, Mr. Wicks," replied the landlady, promptly. "It is because there is so much due on your board"

◆

Probably Not.

Practical Father—"Has that young man that wants to marry you any money?"

Romantic Miss—"Money! He gave me a cluster diamond ring studded with pearls."

Practical Father—"Yes, I know. Has he any money left?"

◆

Proving an Alibi.

She—"George, dear, why do you invariably go out on the balcony when I begin to sing? Does it make you sad, dear?"

He—"Not exactly that, dear, but I couldn't bear the neighbors to accuse me of wife-beating!"

◆

The Biggest Trust.

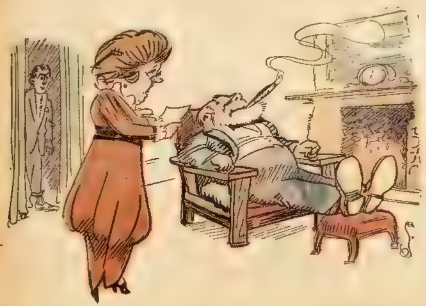
"The biggest trust on earth is the country newspaper. It trusts everybody, gets cussed for trusting, mistreated for trusting and if it busts for trusting, gets cussed for busting."

◆

Economic Defense.

"Why don't women dress sensibly?"

"If they did, half the industries of the world would go to smash."



Mrs. Highbrow—"Ferdinand has just received his degree of doctor of laws."

Uncle Silas—"Doctor of laws, eh! I always knew our laws had been doctored an awful lot, but I thought the Legislature done it."

The Minister Scored.

The young lawyer didn't like the minister, and so he thought to corner him.

"Now, doctor," he asked, "suppose the parson and the devil should have a lawsuit, which party do you think would win?"

"The devil, unquestionably," replied the minister.

"Ah!" chuckled the young lawyer. "And will you tell us why?"

"Because he would have all the lawyers on his side."

◆

Not That Sort.

Miss Flirtie—"No, it cannot be. I am already engaged."

Adorer—"Eh? If you were already engaged, why didn't you tell me so?"

Miss Flirtie (indignantly)—"I am not the sort of a girl to boast of my conquests."

Cute.

"The immensity of nature strikes every one with the same awed feeling."

"No, it doesn't I took a girl to the circus once, and she told me she thought the hippopotamus was cute."

◆

Warned.

"I found the goods I bought for my new suit so deceiving."

"Well, you know they were advertised as double-faced."

An Agricultural Education.

Proud Father—"Welcome back to the old farm, my boy! So you got through college all right?"

Farmer's Son—"Yes, father"

Proud Father—"Ye know I told ye to study up on chemistry and things, so you'd know best what to do with different kinds of land. What do you think of that medder there, for instance?"

Farmer's Son (joyfully)—"Jehoshaphat! What a place for cricket!"

◆

Ordered It Rare.

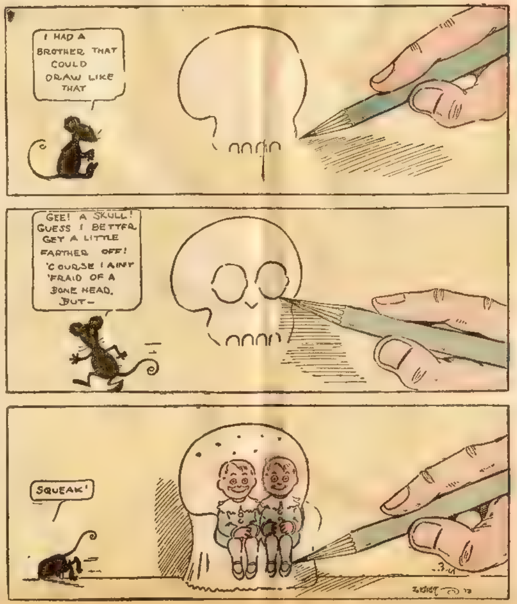
Waiter—"Here you are, sir! Porterhouse steak rare—that was your order, I believe."

Guest—"H'm! It isn't long since this beef was killed, is it?"

"I—I s'pose not, sir."

"No, can't be very long. I see it is still warm."

ARTIST FOOLINGS


I HAD A BROTHER THAT COULD DRAW LIKE THAT
GEE! A SKULL! GUESS I BETTER GET A LITTLE FARTHER OFF! 'COURSE I AIN'T 'FRAID OF A BONE HEAD. BUT—
SQUEAK!

Self-Conscious.

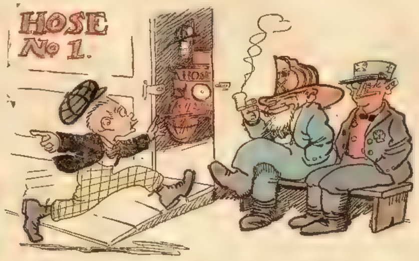
"What made you jilt Harold Hicollar?" asked Maud

"I didn't," replied Mamie. "His conceit misled him. I said I wouldn't marry the best man alive and he thought I meant him."

Expensive.

Young Man—"I should like to ask your advice, sir, as to whether you think your daughter would make a suitable wife."

Lawyer—"No, I don't think she would Five dollars, please."



Willie Rube—"S-say, chief, Gus Hiney's barn took ablaze."

Chief Woggles—"Wall, you tell Gus t' come here and apologize fer what he said about this hose company maybe then we'll try to quench his fire."

An Early Appeal.

A business man, with sporting proclivities was the owner of a small sailing boat. One afternoon he invited a friend to go with him for a sail.

A squall came up suddenly, and the owner was pitched overboard. While he was struggling with the waves his friend peered anxiously over the side of the boat and cried:

"I say, Simon, if you don't come up for the third time, may I have the boat?"

◆

Tough Parishioners.

Deacon Blunt—"So your congregation gave you no vacation this year?"

Dominy Dull—"Not a week; not a day!"

Deacon Blunt—"Well! well! They are the hardest people to tire out I ever heard of."

◆

Silence.

"Once a friend of mine and I agreed that it would be helpful for each of us to tell the other of his faults."

"How did it work?"

"We haven't spoken for nine years."

◆

A Dry Well.

Train Robber—"Come! shell out!"

Rural Minister (sadly)—"If I had such energetic fellows as you to pass the plate now and then, I might have something to give you."

◆

The Why.

Teacher of Hygiene—"Why must we always be careful to keep our homes clean and neat?"

Little Girl—"Because company may walk in at any minute."—Judge.

◆

House Owner—"How does your furnace work this weather?"

Tenant—"The exercise of raking it keeps me warm enough, but the other members of the family complain."

Uncle Josh Defeated.

Lawyer—"Well, my young friend, your Uncle Josh determined that you should be a farmer, or get nothing from him. He did not leave you a cent of money, but he willed you his plow, cultivator, mowing machine, thrasher, portable sawmill, stone crusher, road scraper, and stump puller."

Young Scribbler—"All right, I'll sell them"

Lawyer—"He has provided against that. You can not sell, or even rent them. You must use them yourself"

Young Scribbler—"Very well, I will."

Lawyer—"On the old farm?"

Young Scribbler—"No; I'll write a play and use them on the stage."

◆

He Gave the Reason.

The sweet young thing was being shown through the locomotive works.

"What is that thing?" she asked, pointing with her dainty parasol.

"That," answered the guide, "is an engine boiler."

She was an up-to-date young lady and at once became interested. "And why do they boil engines?" she inquired again.

"To make the engine tender," politely replied the resourceful guide.

◆

Out of the Frying Pan.

"When she married, ten years ago, she stated freely that it was simply to avoid working for a living."

"What does she do all the time?"

"Takes care of seven small children."—Judge.

◆

Convincing Information.

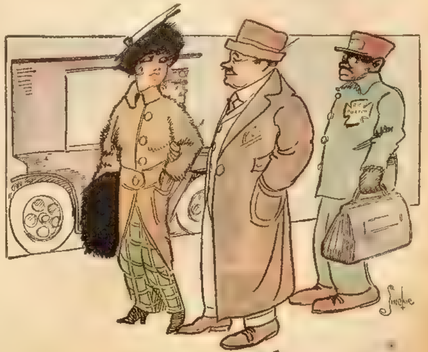
"How do you tell mushrooms from toadstools?"

"I wait till next morning. If I'm here, they were mushrooms. If I'm in Heaven, they were toadstools."

Fatal Day Was Near.

"Charles seems to be very exacting" said a fond mamma to the dear girl who was dressing for the wedding.

"Never mind mamma," said she sweetly, "they are his last wishes."



Mrs. Benham—"I thought of you every one of the ten days I was away."

Benham—"But you wrote for money only five times; what brought me into your mind the other five days?"

The Rim Rock Bandit

(Continued from page eleven.)

Mortimer sat up straight, then stared at his companion.

"By the horn spoon!" he exclaimed. I wonder if it's possible that—but, for that matter, I wear a brown beard myself." And Mortimer's blue eyes twinkled when he said that.

"Why are those cowmen not hunting the bandit?" asked Foote.

"They've just wound up a hunt of a day and a half," Mortimer answered. He went on, "Now me and old Ledworth figgers that the bad-man will try to hold him and old Dugger up, too, like he done Credlow; and Ledworth, havin' faith in me, wants me to stand guard over his ranch house at night, and try to catch the robber. I put you in on it, see? Well, if we get the bandit, we're to get another thousand from Ledworth. That will make us a thousand each, Friend Foote, eh?"

"Sure," said Foote, with some enthusiasm.

Ledworth's ranch house was a rambling structure of adobe bricks, wood, and tile. About it grew shrubs and flowers peculiar to the clime, but suffering from inattention. On the narrow front veranda, reading an old newspaper, sat Ledworth, grizzled and unkempt, and Foote noted that his eyes were small and mean.

Ledworth rose and shook hands with the Easterner, inviting him and Mortimer to be seated. They sat on the veranda and talked until time for the evening meal, which was prepared and served by an old Mexican woman who acted as both cook and housekeeper.

When night had fallen Joe Mortimer took the first half of it on duty, and Foote wrapped himself in a blanket on the veranda. Nothing had happened at midnight, when Foote was roused by his friend to stand guard until daybreak. Mortimer lay down and wrapped himself in the blanket Foote had just left.

Mortimer rose at full dawn. There was a stillness about the place that seemed unusual. He donned his broad hat, and hastened around the house to find his friend. He found Foote sitting on the sand, his back against the adobe wall, snoring lightly. A kindly feeling caused him to pass the Easterner by without waking him, and he entered the house by an open rear door. In another minute he had stopped still and was staring——

The old Mexican woman was bound to her bed with strips of cloth torn from the coverlets, and a gag was in her mouth! Mortimer quickly liberated her, and hastened to see if anything had happened to old Ledworth.

Something had! Ledworth was lying on the floor of his little bedchamber—and he was securely bound and effectively gagged! Mortimer drew his clasp knife and cut the gag and the bonds. The old cattleman sat up and showed his rescuer a face hideous with wrath.

"Oh, you're a fine one!" he sneered. "You're a fine one, you—you nasty coyote! The bandit took all the money I had—all! Yes, the big fellow with the burlin' brown beard hang'n' from under his mask, with the dobie pesos on his chaps and the two pearl-handled sixes! You nasty——"

"Cut it!" cried Mortimer. "When was it—when did he come?"

"About three hours ago," snorted Ledworth, rising to his feet with a groan. "He done me the same as he did Credlow—made me dig out my strong box and open it, and then tied me up. You nasty coyote!"

It had happened during the half of the night in which Foote had been supposed to watch. Mortimer stepped to a small window which faced to the rear. He saw several Crossed-L cowmen coming toward the house. He knew that Foote would be accused of going to sleep on duty, or of gross carelessness, at least, if it became known to the cowmen that the bandit had made his haul during the Easterner's time to watch.

"Oh, Foote!" called Mortimer, leaning out at the window.

Foote yawned, got to his feet, and approached Mortimer.

"Listen," whispered Mortimer. "The robber's been here in the time of your trick, and you'd better leave here right now. Get your hoss and pack mule, and go to Alejandra; I'll meet you there as soon as I can get away from here."

Foote strode rapidly away without making a reply.

The cowmen came on, and Mortimer noted that the foreman, Lakin, was not among them. He turned and went back to Ledworth, who was now sitting on his bed with his tousled head in his hands, his miser's face the picture of despair.

"Never you mind," offered Mortimer, in the way of consolation; "he'll be caught, and then you can get all your money back. How much was it that he got, Ledworth?"

"Eight thousand dollars!" Ledworth moaned.

Mortimer whistled. Then the cowmen entered, and their faces were made very sober by their employer's downcast appearance. They knew what had happened—but they did not know, nor did Ledworth himself, that the robbery had taken place during Foote's half of the night. They eyed Mortimer angrily.

"Where's Lakin?" Mortimer wanted to know.

"Down at Jose de Lara's," answered one of the cowmen. "Jose is fixin' Lakin's saddle."

"Ah-hum!" growled Mortimer. "You're sure he's at Jose's?"

Lakin was liked by his men. In Mortimer's voice there had been an ill-concealed suspicion which served as a kind of last straw. One cowman took the leadership of his fellows; he whisked Mortimer's revolver from its holster and covered Mortimer with it.

"We've been telling each other that you was the robber," he snapped savagely. "I told the boys that the old man there would lose his pile on the night just gone, and he has. The old man wouldn't listen—but it's too late now to blame him. Come, Mortimer, where's the money?"

"Well, you blamed——" began Mortimer, enraged, when the leader of the cowmen jabbed the revolver forward viciously and interrupted.

"Cut that out! Your little bad-man game is over, and you might as well 'fess up to where you hid the money. If you will, we'll turn you loose—with the understandin' that you'll steer clear o' this here section in the future."

"Well, you blamed fool!" exclaimed Mortimer.

He changed his tactics, however, and his anger apparently vanished. He laughed at the cowmen, and bullied them good-naturedly. But it was no go. The cowmen believed that he was the Rim Rock bandit so hard that no small thing could convince them that they were in error. Mortimer did not mention Lakin again; it would only have made the cowmen the madder.

After a hard struggle, Mortimer's hands were bound behind him, and his accusers began to lead him across the plains and toward a shallow valley filled with cottonwood, ash, and a scrubby undergrowth. One of them carried a rope in his hand. When they had reached a spot beneath a large tree with a convenient outstanding branch, they halted. The man who carried the rope gave it to the leader; the latter made a slip noose and placed it about Mortimer's neck, and threw the other end of the lariat over the outstanding branch above. Then the rope was drawn to a tautness that barely permitted Mortimer to breathe.

The leader then confronted the helpless adventurer and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"One more chance, Joe," he said. "Tell us where you put the money you stole, or you'll adorn this here tree before another minute has passed. Out with it, Joe."

Mortimer was very mad.

"Go on with the killin', you set o' bustheads!" he snorted, his face showing red above his beard because of the tightness of the rope about his neck. "You're hell bent on doin' it, and there's nothin' I can say will stop you. I won't be the first good man a passel o' scatterbrained coyotes has hung for want o' plain hoss sense. Go on with the killin', will you?"

"Look here, Joe Mortimer, you——"

"Aw, shut up!" blared Mortimer, struggling involuntarily against the bonds that held his wrists together at his back. "Shut up! I've done told you I can't say nothin' that'll clear me, and you might as well get the thing over with."

"So you'd hang, confound you, ruther than tell——"

"Hush, you hydrophobia cat!" came from the infuriated Mortimer. "Go on with your blood-red murder, you set o' brutes! You cowards—afraid to tackle me a man at a time, you are, by the horn spoon! I ain't sayin' that I ain't skeered to die: I am skeered to die, me bein' human and not a brute like you. Well, don't prolong the mis'ry!"

It was apparent that Joe Mortimer was innocent, or a man of nerve and bluff colossal—unheard-of nerve and bluff. The cowmen began to stare at one another, a question in the eyes of each.

The leader turned again to the accused, doubtless meaning to take the ropes from him—but something happened before he had the opportunity of carrying out his purpose.

There had stepped from behind a big cottonwood some twenty yards away a big man with a burling brown beard hanging from beneath a black mask, a big man wearing silver-bespangled chaps, and holding two big pearl-handled sixes leveled toward them!

"Cut that man loose!" ordered the unknown, the Rim Rock bandit, in a voice so gruff that it seemed to have come from very deep within his chest, and which was evidently an assumed voice.

It was not necessary that he speak twice. The Crossed-L men were not cowards, and all of them were passing good shots; but that which they had heard of this lone and mysterious robber—magnified, no doubt—would not be forgotten. Besides, his appearance was eminent proof that Joe Mortimer was innocent. The cowmen lost no time in slashing away the ropes that held Mortimer, new ropes though they were. Mortimer, free, stood staring at the unknown with gratitude in his sincere blue eyes.

"Friend," said Mortimer, "you've saved me, I reckon, at your own peril, and I'm much obliged. It would 'a' been easy to let this bunch go on and hang me, and then have an open way to another big holdup."

The heavy bass voice of the Rim Rock bandit came again:

"Cut the buck home!"

It was plain that he had addressed the whole party, including Joe Mortimer. They all started, and, with a backward glance now and then, began to cross the mile of plains that lay between the cottonwood-filled valley and the ranch house of the Crossed-L. And as they went the cowmen apologized to Mortimer most contritely for the injury they had done him.

After an hour spent in trying to console Ledworth, Mortimer saddled his sunburned black and rode to Alejandra. As he cantered up the one narrow street, he was gratified to see that Foote's calico and pack mule were standing before the Green Owl. He dismounted and strode into the saloon, where he found Foote sitting at a small table and playing a game of solitaire. The hunt for the bandit had already begun, and Foote and the proprietor of the Green Owl were the only persons there when Mortimer entered.

Foote looked up with a start, and a smile of relief crossed his strong, smooth face when he recognized his friend.

"Well, what?" he asked eagerly.

Mortimer told him in a few words.

"And what do you think about Lakin," Foote wanted to know, "since you saw the bandit for yourself?"

"I think he's the Rock Rim bandit," answered Mortimer, "but I ain't goin' to breathe it, Friend Foote. That there bandit might 'a' saved my carcass—I reckon he did save it, for the Crossed-L men was mad. I don't need money bad enough to try to catch him any more. And you?"

"The same here," said Foote. "I'm a friend of yours, you know."

"Shake!" exclaimed Mortimer—and they shook.

The hunt for the robber went on and on. The country was combed—even the Rim Rock country was combed for the lone robber. And right into the middle of the excitement came more excitement—the other of the three old cattlemen, Dugger of the Double-Diamond, was held up to the tune of several thousand dollars! The result of this was that Duggar swelled the reward offered greatly, and every man in Alejandra except Joe Mortimer and Laramie Foote set out to try to get a pot-shot at the bandit. Even the Mexicans went. But for a few women and the two men just named, Alejandra was deserted.

Joe Mortimer and Laramie Foote, not being in the hunt for reasons of their own, had been engaged to take care of the Green Owl during the proprietor's absence.

Came the evening of the day following that on which the proprietor of the Green Owl had fared forth with a Winchester with a small army that had enlisted itself to round up the Rim Rock bandit. Joe Mortimer, who had charge of the saloon department, decided to retire early, as there was no business and no promise of any that night. He had just barred the windows, and was in the act of locking the door that led to the street, when a voice hailed him from without.

"Hello, in there!"

Mortimer opened the door. There stepped from the black night into the dim light of the saloon's smoky lamp a big man wearing a burling brown beard and a broad hat pulled low over his eyes, a pair of buckskin chaps adorned with Mexican dollars, and two pearl-handled revolvers.

"By the horn spoon!" ejaculated Mortimer.

The bandit walked to the bar and leaned against it, with his face in the shadow. Mortimer followed him wonderingly.

"Lock the door," ordered the unknown, in an assumed gruff voice.

Mortimer obeyed. He was not afraid of this man, for he believed the bandit had saved his life.

"Anything I can do for you?' asked the provisional bartender, going around to his post of duty.

You can listen to me for a few minutes," answered the strange man, his voice still gruff, his face still in the shadow. "Anybody near us who could overhear?'

"Nobody but my friend Foote, in the next room. But you can trust Foote with your life. He's my pal, Foote is."

The bandit then began a little story:

'A long time ago four men uncovered a fine gold mine to the north of here. Their names were Credlow, Ledworth, Duggar, and—one other man, who was my father. The men I named deliberately cheated my father out of his share—and then had the gall to laugh at him for the easy way in which he fell! Get that? Yes. Well, needless to say it was very mean in Credlow, Ledworth, and Dugger. My father's share should have brought him thirty thousand dollars, at least. I came here to even matters for my dad. I've got twenty-five thousand dollars of the money back, which I'm going to give to my dad—who has been utterly broken in spirit since he lost his pile to his scoundrelly pals.

"Now, listen. I'm going to happen in here in a few days, when the cowmen all have given up the hunt, and bring with me a pair of silver-bespangled chaps, a broad, bloody hat with a bullet hole in it, and a pair of pearl-handled sixes. I'll have a knife cut on one arm to lend blood to the hat and color to the story that I killed the Rim Rock bandit down on the bank of the Rio Grande and threw his body in—and then I'll collect the five thousand dollars reward that's out for me. Get that? Yes, of course it'll work. It can't fail. Joe, from the look on your face, I take it that you've already recognized my voice; but I couldn't help but talk natural when I was telling about my old dad——"

He pushed back his broad hat, jerked off his disguising, burling brown beard, and revealed to Joe Mortimer the strong, smooth face of the man Joe Mortimer had known as——

Laramie Foote.

* * *

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The Cabalistic Hand

Or, TELLTALE FINGERPRINTS

By George Ethelbert Walsh

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CHAPTER XVI.

TO AWAKEN from a dreamless sleep to find yourself in a dark, damp cellar, with a soft, warm body under you, and a dim, flickering gas-jet flaring fitfully over your head; to feel a horrible nausea that wrenches and [illegible] stomach and a splitting headache that drives out all memory or consciousness of the past; to experience all the sensations of having come into a new world with no connecting link with the past, the mind playing you fantastic tricks and the eyes smarting and paining every time the lids jerk open, in spite of the will to keep them closed—to pass through all the horrors of such a nightmare, unable to determine whether you are asleep or awake, brings one mighty close to the borderland of insanity.

Indeed, for a long time I raved; inarticulately, it may be, but raved and babbled like a doddering old man in the last stages of senility. I was temporarily as insane as any man confined in strait-jacket at the institutions for the feeble-minded. And while I raved the physical pain goaded me on to despair. I clutched at my throat, dug at the smarting eyes, and tore at the pit of my stomach as if I would root out the terrible thing that was nauseating me. I rolled over and over in the dirt of the cellar, and rubbed my face in the grime of the floor; but the cries and screams that seemed to fill my ears with their echo were in reality nothing but murmuring, inarticulate growls. I was almost as speechless as I was blind and memoryless

Returning strength and nerve force gradually drew me back from that dark abyss, and the clouds that obscured the mind and memory cleared. The pains still assailed me, and I frequently had to drop back on the dusty floor to pant for breath; but the mind asserted its supremacy, and once more I became mentally normal and sane.

When I could collect my thoughts I sat up and stared around the cellar, holding my head with both hands to keep it from splitting asunder. The gas-jet seemed unreal and uncanny, like a pin point of flame in a great sea of darkness; but as my eyes grew accustomed to it I searched around for other objects that would enlighten me.

There was the pot of dirt, and near it the Cassiopeia plant, and beside it on the floor Maxine's open penknife. But where was Maxine? I gasped in terror as I asked this question. I tried to struggle to my feet, but sank back with a groan.

Then my hand came in contact with something soft. I touched and felt of it half-dreamily, but a moment later shouted—or thought I shouted—in glee, for it was Maxine's leg.

He lay there on the floor sprawled out like a dead man. He was so stiff and silent that for a dizzy moment I was sure that he had followed his last clew. The something which had sent me off into that land of darkness had killed him without doubt; but a moment later, when I felt of his throat and chest, I knew that, although he had wandered close to the great borderland of death, life was still in his body.

I could do little, in my weakened condition, to revive him. I tore open his coat, tugged at his collar, breathed into his face, and tried to chafe his hands; but it was Nature, and not my skill, that finally brought forth a feeble sigh from his lips and eventually a quicker beating of the heart.

I never want to see a man recalled from the brink of such an awful death again. I had experienced the sensations, and now I could appreciate the agony that Maxine was passing through. No man could wish to go through it again; better death itself than such a nightmare of physical and mental tortures. Every groan and wrench, as Maxine struggled out of the infernal cloud of darkness and pain, made me wince; but I could only watch and wait, pitying, but unable to render relief.

It was a wan, haggard face that finally turned toward me, encompassed on either side by hands that clutched desperately to hold the head from flying asunder. We stared back at each other for a long time, each too feeble and sick to speak the thoughts that were now racing through our minds. Maxine was constitutionally my superior, and he regained control of himself quicker than I did. When he spoke his voice sounded far off and strangely unreal.

"Montague," he said slowly, "have you any intelligent idea of just what happened?"

He was too calm and methodic in his words to please me, and I felt a terrible sense of irritation seizing me.

"No," I said abruptly and briefly.

"I thought perhaps you saw me fall," he continued.

"I did," I snapped out

"And you fell atop of me, Montague. That was the last impression I had, and I had an insane desire to kick you. It would have been laughable if it were not serious."

"It's far from a laughing matter," I growled surlily. "My head [illegible] so I can hardly stand it."

Yes so it must, and mine, too. But that will pass. The point is, what happened to us?"

"How do I know?" I snapped irritably. You didn't see any one back of us?"

"No, we were alone down here unless"

"Yes," nodding his head, "unless he was here."

"You think he attacked us from behind?" I asked fearfully in a whisper

"Would it be possible for any one to do that without our seeing him?"

"I saw nothing and heard nothing. I felt a sudden giddiness and blindness, and then I saw you topple over, and I fell on top of you"

"You saw nothing else"

"No, nothing. If there was anybody in the cellar, he must have been a ghost."

"Still something happened to us, Montague. We were both rendered unconscious, and it seems a miracle we're alive this minute"

I almost wish I wasn't," I rejoined sadly.

"Did you smell any peculiar odor before you lost consciousness?" Maxine asked, after a pause.

"Nothing but the odor of that accursed Cassiopeia plant!"

"Why accursed, Montague?"

"Because it has brought nearly all of our troubles. Whenever we found that odor there was danger lurking around. It's always been so. I'm done with it; I hope never to smell it again."

"But you do smell it now, Montague; it's lying there close to your feet."

I turned and hastily snatched up the plant and would have hurled it to the far corner of the cellar; but Maxine caught my arm and held it firmly.

"That's only a part of the delirium, Montague," he said soothingly. "It will soon pass away. Now try to calm yourself. If there's anything associated with the odor of this plant and our series of misfortunes, we must find it out."

"I don't want to investigate the odor any further," I answered, as a qualm of nausea seized me again.

"The plant is innocent enough, Montague. It did not cause our sudden pain and unconsciousness."

"How do you know?" I asked eagerly. "The sensation of giddiness came to us just as you cut into the tuber of the plant. How do you know that the juice of the roots doesn't contain a volatile poison."

"Perhaps you're right, Montague. It's strange that we hadn't thought of it before."

"Then throw the accursed thing away, Maxine!" I shouted. "Don't bring further trouble upon us."

"The poison must have escaped by this time, Montague, if it was poison. I think we can handle it without fear now."

I watched him pick up the plant and stare at it. The very sight of it now seemed to nauseate me. I wanted him to throw it away, but he would not. When he placed it to his nose to smell of it, I could almost have screamed a protest.

"Montague," he said slowly, "there is another strong odor here. It smells like bitter almonds does it not?"

In spite of my disgust he thrust the plant close to my nose, and I nodded assent and then clapped both hands over my nostrils and moaned.

"Montague," I heard him exclaim again, "this is very queer. Look at the tuber I cut off. It's collapsed, and there's nothing in it. What does that mean?"

"I suppose it was full of juice, and it ran out when you cut it."

"And left a skin like this?" he rejoined, holding up a filmy substance that looked like the collapsed toy balloon of a child. "That isn't a vegetable substance, Montague," he continued.

He fingered it carefully and smelt of it again.

"Bitter almond oil," he murmured. "What is it that smells like that?"

"Cassiopeia, probably," I replied in derision.

In spite of his suffering, which I knew he was struggling hard against, he continued to examine the bladder-like tube of the plant, touching and smelling of it, and frowning occasionally. He was a grotesque figure, sitting there on the cellar floor, haggard of face and trembling from sheer weakness, but with eyes and face as keen and interested as if in his study in the full possession of all his faculties. Suddenly he looked up at me, and a new light of intelligence flared into his piercing eyes.

"Montague," he said, a little nervously, "we were poisoned."

"I have no doubt of it," I jeered recklessly.

"It was cyanogen gas, and it's a wonder we are alive at this minute."

"Cyanogen gas?" I stammered, mystified.

"Yes, and that accounts for this bitter almond odor. The odor clings to the bulb after the gas has all escaped."

"How did cyanogen gas get in the bulb?" I demanded. "Is that another freak of Cassiopeia? If it makes a poison, I want nothing more to do with it."

"No, Montague, it didn't store up the gas of itself. It was put there by some one. These bulbous roots are not natural; they're artificial, made of some soft substance like rubber, and filled with cyanogen gas. This colorless liquid would not show through the rubber skin, but once punctured the gas would escape with a rush. I was bending right over it when my knife cut into it, and I got a bigger whiff than you did. It's about as deadly a poison as found anywhere on earth. The only thing I can imagine that saved us was we toppled over so quickly that after the first brief whiff of it we were shielded by our positions. We both fell with our faces downward and with our noses buried in the dirt. The gas escaped and floated upward."

"Then it was the work of our old enemy," I gasped.

"Undoubtedly he had considerable to do with it."

"He left no fingerprint to warn us."

"Perhaps he thinks he has warned us enough. Hereafter we must be constantly on the watch. At any minute we may fall into a trap set by him. Yes, Montague, it is war to the hilt now, and we must expect no mercy."

"If we don't tamper with his clews, which he's so fond of scattering around, we'd have no trouble," I replied. "Hereafter I'll leave anything alone that I find. I won't run any more risk."

Maxine smiled at my sudden impetuosity.

"That, I imagine, would be difficult," he replied slowly. "How will you know whether the article you find has been sent by our enemy or not?"

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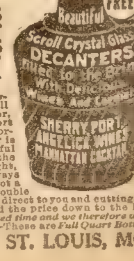
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I started in horror at this calm recital of the different possible forms of vengeance that our unknown enemy might wreak upon us. My lips blanched white, and my voice grew weak and sibilant.

"You think he intends to destroy us no matter what we do?" I stammered. "It isn't simply to frighten us off his trail?"

"I know that he is on our trail," Maxine replied, with a glitter in his eyes, "and he intends to fight it out with us. If we once weakened now, he would gloat over his triumph and proceed to torture us with uncertainty. No, Montague, we can't afford to relax our efforts. A criminal like this is more than a men-

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ace to our lives; he is a menace to all society. His triumph over us now might mean the beginning of an awful series of criminal orgies. I suspect he is planning some great diabolical scheme that will set at defiance all law and order, and he is first trying us out. If he can vanquish us—baffle and defeat us—it will be easier for him to defy all the organized forces of government."

With trembling, halting limbs, rendered weak by the poison, Maxine got up and tramped up and down the dark cellar, twitching and kicking his legs to get the kinks out of them and unlimbering the inert muscles.

"Defeat for us—death, if it is to come—would be a terrible catastrophe," he continued. "It would give to this arch fiend confidence in his abilities that would carry him to the commission of any crime. What could Inspector McGonigle do with his minions against such a character if we were once put out of the way? For the present we stand between this creature and society. So long as we are in his pathway he will not break loose. We must baffle him; we must break his power, or—or—Montague, I hesitate to predict what may happen. The whole social fabric may tremble on its foundations; the underworld, under his leadership, will revolt, and we will return to the days of barbarous atrocities when no man's life was worth a pinch of salt.

"But," and the eyes twinkled with hope, "success is a dangerous thing for any man. It produces over-confidence, vanity, conceit, and that has been the undoing of many a good man. It is the weapon which this master criminal will have directed against himself. Each success will make him bolder, and therein lies our hope. He will become more reckless, and eventually he may overstep himself. Against that time and day, Montague, we must be prepared and watchful; when it comes we must strike swiftly and surely. See to it that we do not blunder, too, when our opportunity arrives."

CHAPTER XVII

WE PICKED ourselves up finally, and, though somewhat shaken of nerve and considerably weakened by the poison we had inhaled, we made a fairly presentable appearance when we emerged from the house and directed our footsteps toward home. Maxine insisted upon wrapping the plant up in a newspaper, pot and all, to carry away with us. I advised him to leave the wretched thing where he found it, but he replied that he wanted to keep it among his collection of curios, and, besides, there was danger of some of the servants tampering with it and being poisoned.

There were still several of the tuber-like roots intact, puffed out by their colorless liquid, which we now knew to be a deadly poison, and a pin prick might release the gas to overcome any one who might accidentally handle it. We were sure that Miss Seldon had not placed the plant in the cellar, for upon examination we found that it was not the famous Cassiopeia plant at all. It was largely a fake plant skilfully attached to the artificial bulbs, or rather, the plant had one or two genuine tubers of its own, and the artificial ones were attached to these.

"It is a most skilfully contrived fake," Maxine said more than once. "Only a genius could produce such an article. Our enemy must be an adept worker in artificial plants."

"If it's not the Cassiopeia plant," I asked, "how do you account for the wonderful odor?"

"Very easily explained, Montague. A few drops of the essence were squirted over the leaves to deceive us. That also disguised the odor of the cyanogen gas."

Maxine made a chemical analysis of the contents of one of the other soft tubers in his laboratory, and satisfied himself that it was really the deadly poison he had surmised. The colorless liquid had been put into the collapsible tubers and the opening hermetically sealed. It was as ingenious as it was a deadly contrivance.

The part of the plant that was genuine belonged to a common species of air plants, and life was sustained by the nourishment it drew from the air and water. Even when the queer combination was placed on the window-sill the fleshy leaves and flowers continued to grow and flourish, and the artificial part remained unchanged. Maxine would often look up at it and shake his head; it was a living witness to the cunning of our enemy.

That day Inspector McGonigle called at the office, and before he opened his mouth to speak we could see that he was worried and disturbed. His fat cheeks were drawn and flabby, and his red eyes showed that he had been passing some sleepless nights.

"Mr. Maxine," he blurted out, after a word of greeting, "we're still all in the dark concerning that trunk murder, and the newspapers are roasting us daily. What are we going to do about it?"

"Have you exhausted all your clews, Inspector?"

"Yes, every one of them. I don't mind telling you privately, but they've all failed us. We don't tell the public that, for we've got to keep up an appearance, but it's God's truth."

"And you have no theory in mind as to who committed the crime?"

The Inspector rubbed his clean-shaven face and mopped his moist brow.

"Yes, I have a theory," he replied slowly, "but I guess it's mostly theory. I ain't got anything to prove it."

"What is it?" asked Maxine, toying with his pencil.

"It was the work of the white slavers, Mr. Maxine," replied McGonigle in a whisper. "This woman found in the trunk must have been one of their victims, who was about to expose them; so they put her away where she couldn't squeal."

"That's possible, Inspector. I'd thought of something like that myself; but dead people tell no tales; so what good will that conclusion do you?"

"Not much, sir, except that it may lead us to look in the right direction. I always look for a motive for a crime first, and then hunt up the one most likely to have that motive."

"That's why you suspected Miss Seldon at first?"

"Yes, sir, frankly that was it. I thought she had a rival, and wanted to get rid of her."

"A rival for the affections of Mr. Philip Fraser?"

"Exactly, sir. You remember the story of her love affair that the newspapers published a year or so ago? This Mr. Fraser was her lover, and for some reason the match was broken off rather suddenly. At any rate, he went away; nobody knew just where, but the newspapers got hold of it, and traced him to South America. He headed an expedition up the Amazon, and when he returned a year later, it was reported he brought back with him a queer present for Miss Seldon. It was a rare plant with a wonderful perfume. It had an intoxicating odor, and had never been brought to this country before. He presented this to Miss Seldon as a token of his undying affection."

"Yes," replied Maxine, "I remember reading something like that in the society gossip of the newspapers, and later her father tried to get another Cassiopeia plant just like it."

"That may be the name of it; I'm not up on plant names, and Mr. Seldon may have sent down to get another. But there was another thing he brought back with him. You remember that?"

"A fer-de-lance, was it not—a very venomous serpent?"

"Yes, sir, one of them poisonous snakes they find down there. Well, the gossip was that he was going to play the Cleopatra act if Miss Seldon wouldn't marry him."

"You mean he threatened her with the fer-de-lance?" asked Maxine, sharply.

"That wasn't the society gossip, but the newspapers may have got things mixed. He may have intended it for her, but the story was he was going to let the snake bite him if she refused. He didn't want to live longer without her love, and that was the dramatic way he proved it."

"And she accepted him?" mused Maxine.

"It looks so. But another story leaked out that one of the causes of their disagreement was a second woman. I don't know how much there was to that. But it seems that this other woman disappeared after Mr. Fraser went to the Amazon. When he returned she appeared on the scene again."

"And you thought the one found murdered in the trunk was this woman?"

Inspector McGonigle nodded gloomily.

"That was the reason we suspected that Miss Seldon and her servants knew something about the murder. But it's all off now."

"Why?"

"We've found the other woman, and she's pretty much alive."

Maxine mused softly, drumming on the table with his knuckles.

"Then you switched to the white slave theory?" he asked, after a pause.

"We had to find some other motive for the crime."

"And the white slave idea was the handiest?"

"We were led to adopt it by a number of queer crimes and attempted crimes lately. The Government is getting after the white slavers pretty hot, and they're trying to cover their trail the best they can. One or two of their victims confessing might send some pretty prominent men to jail. Naturally they're on the run, and they're doing everything in their power to baffle us. They're pretty well organized, and have plenty of money; they're powerful, too, in other ways—in politics, I mean. And when they get cornered they'll turn like rats that they are, and fight—bite any hand stretched out to arrest them. I guess the murder of one or two women to save themselves wouldn't hurt their consciences much."

"You're quite right there, Inspector," remarked Maxine, thoughtfully. Then he asked in a quiet voice, "Have the white slavers a head to their organization?"

"I've heard so, but he's shrewd enough to keep under cover."

"What have you heard about him?"

"Oh, nothing very definite. In fact, rumor is pretty mixed. Some say he's a prominent politician who's made his way up in the world from the gutter; others say he's a foreigner who made his fortune in Europe in the white slave traffic, and has now come here to build up a similar big organization. Then I've heard rumors that he's a shrewd Chinaman or a Jap, and that he's working in unusual ways. But of course you can't believe more than a tenth of these rumors."

"Of course not, Inspector. If we believed every rumor floating around we'd spend all our time running down hoaxes. But I'm interested in hearing all this. It coincides with some little information I've collected."

"You know something then that will help us?" eagerly asked McGonigle.

"Not at the present moment, Inspector. I'm nearly as much in the dark as you. But I may be able to help you later. If I can I shall assuredly do so."

The Inspector's face fell, for he had come for consultation and assistance, and Maxine could not offer him either. After a moment of downcast silence he looked up and said:

"Maybe, Mr. Maxine, that master criminal you talked about the other day is really at large, and we'll need your services badly."

Before replying Maxine rapped gently on the desk with bared knuckles, scowled a few times as some unpleasant thought flitted through his mind, and finally smiled back at the Inspector.

"Perhaps," he admitted guardedly. "Have you seen anything to make you suspect his handiwork?"

"This trunk murder," replied McGonigle, "for one thing is a bit more puzzling than usual. I notice you haven't found any clew that helps solve it. Have you now?"

"There are clews enough, Inspector; too many, in fact, but they don't seem to lead anywhere."

"Ah," sighing, "that's the trouble. They don't lead anywhere, and they keep you guessing."

"I dunno! I dunno!" muttered McGonigle, as he rose heavily and lighted another cigar before departing.

When he had gone Maxine sat a long time in a pensive, absorbed attitude, stirring occasionally as I passed through the office or made a noise with my pen scratching away on a letter. Every little sound seemed to irritate him, and his nervous, highly-strung nature was as responsive to every vibration of air as a violin string.

"Montague," he said finally, "the Inspector's story of Mr. Fraser's love affair was very interesting."

"Yes, sir," I responded, and patiently waited for him to proceed.

"It explains some things that have bothered me," he added, after a pause. "The fer-de-lance is a very unusual snake for this part of the country. In fact, none was known to be in existence outside of the collection at the Park Zoo and one or two specimens belonging to museums and circuses. I have been making inquiries about where to get one."

"And you were not successful?"

"No, a specimen can't be bought in this country."

"Then how did the maker of that bomb get his?"

"I wonder if he obtained it as a loan from Mr. Fraser," murmured Maxine, softly.

"How do you know that his fer-de-lance was alive, sir? This little love af-

(Continued on page twenty-three.)

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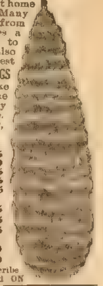

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Chicago Ledger

Entered as second-class matter June 25, 1885, at the postoffice at Chicago, Illinois, under act of March 3, 1879.

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By W. D. BOYCE CO., CHICAGO, ILL.

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For display, $2.50 each Agate Line; for Classified, 30 cents a word, per insertion for 1,250,000 circulation in the Chicago Ledger and The Saturday Blade combined. These two weeklies have an average circulation of

1,250,000
COPIES WEEKLY.

GENTLE JABS

Take off your ear muffs when duty calls.

What one man has done a woman can undo.

Two pennies jingle louder than two $10 bills.

Be like a rooster; if you can't lay an egg, boost.

But the supply of wild oats exceeds the demand.

Perhaps the nude truth is a bare statement of facts.

Our idea of an earthly angel is a satisfactory wife.

A dark horse may be a nightmare to the other candidates.

Even experience falls down when it tries to teach a fool.

Some men never brace up because they take too many bracers.

A man must use his head if he would get there with both feet.

It's easier to talk like a philosopher than it is to act like one.

It is better to be good for revenue only than to be bad for fun.

Love is never so blind that it can't see a rival around the corner.

Living up to our ideals isn't responsible for the high cost of living.

Most of our relatives are about as useless to us as empty tomato cans.

When a married woman loses her temper her husband is apt to catch it.

Lots of men are willing to sell their experience for ten cents on the dollar.

Satan gets so much fun out of his business that he doesn't want a vacation.

A square deal is all a man wants—but he wants to be the judge of its squareness.

A man may make a guess at what a woman is going to do, but that is his limit.

The man who is able to deliver the goods never has to carry a good luck charm.

When a woman asks a man how old he thinks she is, it's up to him to lie like a gentleman.

When a young man calls on a girl and she tells him that she expects to die an old maid, it is equivalent to a proposal.

Once in a great while a mother manages to persuade her daughter to marry the kind of man who will make her happy.

For years scientists have been telling us there are microbes in kisses, but most girls are willing to do a little investigating.

PEPPERS

Father to the Men.

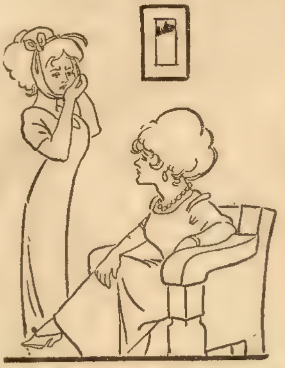
John Purroy Mitchell, Mayor of New York, is very young, but his success as a politician has given him unusual self-assurance. Apropos of this his enemies are telling a story about his boyhood.

"Mitchell, one summer"—so they tell the tale—"decided to work during his vacation. Accordingly he got a job in a grocery. He was then about 8 years of age.

"After he had worked in the grocery a week or so his uncle, meeting the old grocer, asked:

"'Well, how are you getting along with Johnny at the store?'

"'I seem to please him,' said the old grocer, with grim smile. 'I seem to please him.'"



Ella—"The latest arrival in town is coming to call this evening and I was expecting to make an impression, but I have an ulcerated tooth and just look at my face."

Stella —."Yes — you have a swell chance."

No Diplomat.

While the lyceum platform has no monopoly of the bete noir business, it has its full tale of them.

One of the worst dreaded of them is being called to the home of some enterprising citizen who has a daughter afflicted with recititis.

"Bob" Burdette recently told a story that Opie Read had told him, about Opie's experience in trying to sidestep an ordeal of this nature in an Illinois town.

Opie had finished his evening's story telling, when a citizen approached him, complimented him, and added:

"Mr. Read, we have a daughter who, I think, is very talented in the elocutionary line. I wish you would come to our house tomorrow morning about nine, and hear her."

Opie had agonizing previsions of "Curfew Shall Not," and other things, including "Lasca," so he said:

"I'm might sorry, but I have to leave tonight for the West."

"But there's no train."

"Yes, there's the 12:54."

"But it goes East."

"Did I say West? I meant East."

"But it is a freight, you know."

"I have permission to ride it. I must get it for my next date."

"But it is a fast freight and doesn't stop here."

"Ordinarily, no. But I have permission from the superintendent. He notified the local agent and it is to stop."

"Well, that's funny! I'm the agent."

Opie looked at the man a moment in utter defeat, then said:

"There's just one more thing I can say, and that is I'm the biggest liar in Illinois. Where is your house?"—Judge.

A Quick Retort.

Champ Clark has the happy knack of being able to parry inconvenient interruptions with some smart retort that immediately squashes the opposition. He was speaking at a rather noisy meeting, some time ago, and after a short time a big chunk of wood was thrown at him. Fortunately, the aim was bad, and it fell harmless on the platform.

Mr. Clark picked it up and showed it to the audience.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, in tones of mock anxiety, "one of our opponents has lost his head!"

Could Not Dispute Him.

The orders of J. W. Brooks, a once celebrated American railroad manager of Michigan, were, it is said, almost beyond deciphering. On a certain occasion, when a second line had been laid on one of the branch roads, it was reported at headquarters that the barn of an old farmer stood partly upon land which the company had bought, and dangerously near to passing trains. Mr. Brooks, just getting ready for a trip down the Mississippi, wrote to the farmer that he must move his barn from the company's land at once. If he delayed he would be liable to a suit for damages. The old farmer duly received the letter, and was able to make out the manager's signature, but not another word could he decipher. He took it to the village postmaster, who, equally unable to translate the hieroglyphics, was unwilling to acknowledge it.

"Didn't you sell a strip of land to the railroad?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, I guess this is a free pass over the road."

"And for over a year the farmer used the manager's letter as a pass, not one of the conductors being able to dispute his translation of the instrument.

A Crushed Husband.

That fate often ordains differently was demonstrated by a story told by Governor Elias M. Ammons of Colorado, while on a recent trip through the East.

Some time since, so narrated the Governor, Smith returned to his home town in the West after a short absence, and while walking down the street ran across his friend, Jones. Glad greeting and then some conversation.

'What in the world is the matter with Brown?" asked Smith, stirring up the ice in the aforesaid greeting. "I saw him on the opposite side of the highway a few minutes ago, and he looked as gloomy as a candidate who had run on the wrong ticket."

"He failed in business," answered Jones. "I thought you knew all about it."

"I knew that he had failed," responded Smith, "but I heard that he had everything made over in his wife's name before the cyclone hit him."

"So he did," rejoined Jones, "and then his wife eloped with the principal creditor."

He Wouldn't Tell.

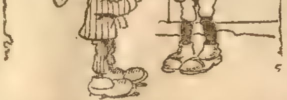
The eminent Dr. Llorente, physician to the royal family of Spain, told a reporter in New York that he thinks the American woman is spoiled.

"In my own country," said Dr. Llorente, "a woman is content to be queen of her household, but here a woman wants to be both king and queen."

The doctor, smiling, continued:

"I was surprised to hear that in some cases the American husband has, actually, to conceal the condition of his finances from his wife in order to curb her extravagances. Thus the rich young wife's complaint to her doctor, a friend of mine in New York, would be impossible in Spain, where married people are happy companions.

"'It is so ridiculous,' pouted my friend's young patient, 'to call the man at the bank a "teller." Why, he won't tell you anything. I asked one the other day how much money my husband had on deposit and he just laughed at me.'"



First Office Boy—"I hear you've quit your job."

Second Office Boy—"Ya-es, you see I couldn't git along wit' de boss an' he wouldn't resign, so I did."

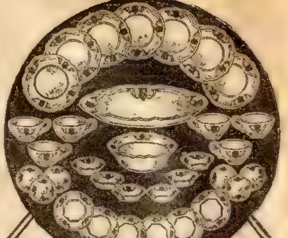
What Poverty Does.

Mayor Rockwell, of Akron, was condemning the claim, often put forward by the rich, that poverty is good for the character.

"Poverty is good for nobody," he said. "It embitters the mind, hardens the heart, causes unhappiness and fear and suffering.

"'There's nothing like adversity,' a millionaire once said to me; 'there's nothing like adversity to bring a man out.'

"'Yes,' I replied, 'out at the elbows.'"



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DORIS LYNDAHL'S FLIGHT

(Continued from page four.)

Terrace had lent itself admirably to Blackmore's scenes in "Lorna Doone." Other views from cosmopolitan life followed, but through all he noted the work of a genius; moreover, it was the work of a genius who had cultivated the art under skilled teachers. Merrill started to his feet, thinking to interview Doris and offer her certain illustrating which he thought suited to her amateur range. But as his hand was on the door another thought came.

"Possibly," thought he, "Lyndahl's wife prefers to keep her own counsel concerning her proffer of illustrating." He recalled the husband's diatribe against literary women; he remembered the patent surveillance of the elder woman. "A dove in a hawk's nest," he mentally observed. "But even a pigeon possesses personal rights. This heaven-born artist shall transact her affairs as she wishes."

The terms evasion, concealment, intrigue, double-dealing, deceit never presented their ominous sounds. Merrill was above all else a clever business manager, and he regarded the matter as a business transaction.

The last Sunday previous to the guests' departure proved to be sun-flooded and altogether enticing. Uncle and nephew yielded to the temptation of a sail on the lake; Madam Lyndahl ordered out the carriage and had Jud, the reluctant, drive her to the village church. Doris, being ghastly with a departing headache, strolled slowly along a woods' pathway, and Gordon, the unregenerate, frankly departed with rod and reel for a nearby stream.

For some time the girl-wife wandered along the aisles of the forest cathedral. No sound broke the silence, but the twitter of migratory birds. But within the hour she detected a curious swaying among the treetops. The sky darkened One of the abrupt storms peculiar to that season was upon her. Rapidly she retraced her way to the Terrace, and at the boat landing encountered Merrill and Dick just retreating from the storm.

"What d'you know 'bout that!" cried Dick. "It's a little tempest. Thought for forty strokes that Neptune had our number. And it looked like thirteen."

As the two joined her, Doris concluded to ask the publisher for her sketchbook and to apologize for her stupidity in dropping it in his way. She had not been able to find it during a swift search. Indeed, she feared it had fallen into other hands. At least she would mention the loss and permit him to think what he would of the reason for her presence in the room. But as she was about to speak the publisher launched into the tabooed subject.

"I've examined your illustrations," he said, with directness. "They're good; more than good. You show originality and training. What you lack is experience at modern, up-to-date stuff. I believe, however, that you could, by studying the market, place some cover designs at moderate pay. As for present work, I'd like to have you try your hand at a series of illustrations for a serial we publish three months from date. Provide two views for each chapter. The setting is rural. I'll send the proof sheets at once."

Doris listened in wild amazement. She illustrate? She furnish cover designs? This was the deferred ambition of her life. Like a flash she realized that the publisher supposed she had purposely submitted the drawings, that he supposed she had in that manner requested employment. During a tense moment she considered. The offer was to her like a glimpse into Paradise. Could she turn her back on this coveted opportunity? Would a pilgrim wearily travel to the very door of Heaven and then deliberately abandon bliss? Never! She saw no harm in accepting this opening, not sought, but for which her soul yearned.

"I'll do all the work you'll trust to me!" she cried. "And, if diligence counts, I'll give satisfaction. Thank you! Thank you beyond words to express!"

"This is a two-edged affair; publishing houses prize newly discovered artists and writers. Subscribe for helpful magazines," he advised, naming two of the best. "Keep in touch with the times and you'll make good."

"I will," she said, with conviction. "That is—if I'm allowed to try. Mrs Lyndahl dislikes——"

"I understand," Merrill interrupted. "But this is your own affair. If," he thoughtfully suggested, "you make use of a pen name, no objection could be raised."

She misunderstood him. Her one anxiety concerned the receipt of mail matter. She knew that every letter passed under Argus eyes. This she supposed was a hint to adopt a new title.

"Would that be justifiable?" she questioned, with hesitancy.

"Certainly," Merrill said, with hearty approval. "Many of the best contributors to fiction gave nom de plumes. I notice one of the most famous of these is your favorite author. Miss Evans, you know, adopted the name of George Eliot."

"That's true," cried Doris. "Then please address all communications intended for me to the name Jud Kilbeam. I'll see the guide and ask him for the privilege."

"Very well," agreed the publisher, and the deal was closed.

When the three entered the big living-room they found Madam Lyndahl returned from church and seated at a front window. She greeted Merrill with dignified and studied politeness, but at the girl-wife she cast a withering glance of deep suspicion and righteous indignation. She chose to regard Doris's alleged headache as a brazen excuse for absenting herself from the morning service. The brief discussion with Merrill at the boat landing had likewise a sinister appearance. Altogether Madam Lyndahl's state of mind harmonized with the gathering storm that now burst in fury. The room darkened to twilight, with lowering clouds, and rain descended in a flood. Gordon, drenched to the last thread, appeared with full basket, and the family gathered about the well-served table

At an early hour of the morning the publisher and his nephew departed for the city. Jud and Gordon Lyndahl accompanied them to the country station. Dick's adieu to Doris had been characteristic.

"You've been the best ever. When you come to town, I'll take you out in the gas-cart. Good-by."

During following days Doris flitted about the house and grounds radiantly happy in anticipation of exercising her beloved art to definite purpose. The thought was inspiring. She ceased to resent Madam Lyndahl's petty tyranny. Joy sweetened life; the world seemed a good place filled with lovable people. Gordon approved of his wife's lightheartedness. He believed in feminine contentment

"Mis' Doris acts like a two-year-old," commented Lucy, while dishwashing "she looks like she'd heard good news."

"Mebby she has," said Jud, speculatively. "Mebby the old woman's going away on a visit."

"No such luck," rejected Lucy. "We'd think we was in Heaven and rest ourselves to death."

"You can begin right now," hinted Jud, "if you'll let me wipe them dishes."

"Yo' jes' hike!" ordered the cook. "Barn wuck an' huntin' is 'nough for yo' without tryin' to run the kitchen."

Jud hiked. His promptness was due to a nagging conscience, not because of Martha's command. He recollected that a woodpile and ax awaited his presence; therefore he secured the latter and diligently attacked the former. With unerring blows he split huge blocks into small sticks. A puffing grunt emphasized each stroke. At the third slab he heard Doris speak his name.

"Jud," said she.

"Yes, ma'am," observed he, and glanced up to see the speaker in natty walking suit at his side.

"Jud, I want to ask a favor."

"It's yours without asking," he declared.

"But, Jud, this is a peculiar favor. I want to use your name."

"What!" cried Jud, with blue eyes wide with amazement and his freckles starring a countenance flushed to crimson.

"I want to have packages of mail matter come in your name, because——"

"Just so," said Jud, beginning to see.

"It's a common practice with people who write or paint," she explained, and told him of John Strange Winter, George Sands and George Eliot. "There will be packages and letters; bring them to me; but," she added with a flush, "please hand them to me when I'm alone."

"You bet I will," cried Jud with an emphatic blow of the ax, "an' if my come-when-you-holler title is fit, why I'm more 'en willing to lend it.

"Thank you, Jud," said Doris.

"And say," he suggested. "I'm some stuck on cattle curing. If it 'ud trim the name up a bit you might have it come: 'Jud Kilbeam, Hoss Doctor.'"

"I will," laughed Doris, and thus the matter was arranged. Within a fortnight Jud found waiting for him at the village postoffice a package and letter addressed as he had suggested, and bearing the Chicago postmark.

"Got friends in the city?" questioned Mrs. Webb, the postmistress, who was afflicted with a consuming curiosity.

"Nope," admitted Jud, "but I sent there to a feller what I heard of for a book what tells how to doctor hosses. They've writ me a letter to explain the drugs."

"Hum-m!" observed Mrs. Webb. "Going in for a veterinary?"

"Nope, just plain hoss doctor," said Jud. "I'm studying up."

Lyndahl's guide was illiterate and somewhat lacking in polish. His round head was covered by a thick shock of red hair, his build was muscular rather than heavy. His honest face with its robin's-egg eyes was [illegible] and polka-dotted with spots of brown. But years of knocking about had ground a razor edge on his naturally keen intellect. Few people ever got the better of Jud, and these few lived to regret their brief conquest. Doris had selected, unconsciously, a champion equal to any ordinary emer

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She inspected the advance sheets and the letter handed her with feverish interest. The writer was one of the subeditors of the Merrill publishing house, and he addressed her entirely by the chosen pen name. The girl's eyes sparkled as she perused the serial that was to be illustrated. Her brain seethed with ideas for the scenes she intended to portray. As she stood before her desk devouring the pages a sharp knock sounded. Thrusting the pages from sight, she tremblingly unlocked and opened the door. Madam Lyndahl stood on the threshold.

"I want the pile of unmended shirts that I told you Gordon would need," she remarked, with cold resentment.

That Doris failed in following her directions exasperated the thorough housewife. In fact, she much preferred to care herself for Gordon's mending; but she wished the young wife to develop a tendency to thrift and love of household tasks. Her eyes swept the room in search of the attraction that kept the young woman so long engaged. "I can't imagine why you lock your door; no one is liable to injure you," she curtly added, as she departed with the linen.

The blood ebbed from Doris's clear skin, leaving her beautiful face white. She could not explain to the accuser that she had in times past invaded her privacy at all hours without the preliminary courtesy of a knock. Sick with apprehension for the safety of her beloved project, the artist buried her head on her arms and thought out the future. At present she knew Gordon's mother merely felt irritated that she wasted time at picture-making. There was an undercurrent of dissatisfaction that the daughter failed to respond to various schemes of industry. Through all fermented the growing sensation of aversion. Like the yeast plant, this condition came from almost nothing, yet spread alarmingly.

"It's my right," concluded Doris, with conviction. "God would never have given me the gift if it was to be suppressed."

She locked her desk and commenced her evening toilet. The gown she selected was of clinging soft black material, heavily ornamented with jet. The garnishing, with hair and throat ornaments of the same, gave her white column of neck and pale face the effect of a portrait framed and matted on black. From the round white arms sleeves of clustering black lace fell back, revealing dimpled elbows. When the last embellishment of dull jet was in place on hair and arms, she descended and occupied her chair at Gordon's right. Gordon, abstracted by news from his lawyer, scarce noticed her presence or appearance, but Madam, at the head of the table, frowned deeply. It was thoroughly provoking that Doris should appear in such actresslike costumes instead of wearing washable cambrics. For the moment the elder woman wished the girl was sufficiently under control to be ordered back to her room and made to don suitable attire.

The forest and Lyndahl Terrace were being etherealized by softly falling snowflakes when Jud mailed back the first package of "copy" and the accompanying illustrations. That astute man-of-all-work timed his daily trip to the office at the exact hour of the outgoing mail. With a zealous care far in access of actual need, he insisted on seeing the parcel dropped into the mail sack, locked in, and off in the stage to Hanover station.

"That there doctor feller don't know beans," he declared. "I'm sending his hoss book back." He grinned with delight at the mystified and unbelieving face of the postmistress.

"She'd peel them wrappers off and have a squint if there was time," he mentally noted.

That evening Madam Lyndahl waited quietly until Doris had retired, then remarked to her son:

"Gordon, I don't think it is best for Doris to spend so many hours in her room. She particularly requires exercise and fresh air."

His mother's tone expressed more than words. She wished to impress Gordon before his departure on a business trip to the city, that his wife endangered, not only her own life, but the welfare of another soon to be.

"Very well," Lyndahl said, without troubling to lift his eyes from the paper, "have her dress suitably and walk—or drive."

"I don't seem to have the slightest influence," admitted his mother. "She is incorrigible."

Lyndahl glanced up inquiringly. "What does it matter?" he demanded. "She sits by an open window much of the time. Besides, she's not the first healthy girl to face maternity. If she prefers to remain quietly in her room fussing at pictures, let her do as she pleases."

Madam Lyndahl said no more; but the advent of this child was to her a matter of intense interest. She determined to compel the girl-mother to observe every hygienic precaution. Child love was with her almost a mania. This peculiar devotion to little ones is often strongly developed in people who care nothing whatever for the same children when grown to maturity. Now, as the matron pondered the matter, she planned to assume charge of the tiny guest. Its every need was to be her care. She would guard it and arrange its future; it was to be trained in all desirable attributes and be freed from undesirable traits.

While the foregoing remarks passed between mother and son, Doris, before her writing desk, gazed at the first substantial check she had ever owned. Doubtless Merrill's personal interest in the amateur had paved the way. No novice discovers a paying market, even in a modest degree, at the start. But Doris held a check and rejoiced. Since the Lyndahl failure, Gordon had lacked the means to provide his wife with small luxuries, even if he had given the matter a thought. He was accustomed to seeing Doris prettily gowned, and the idea that she might wish a sum of cash for private expenditure never entered his head. His views on the subject would have been modified if he had been there to witness the girl's rapture.

"All my own," she murmured, "to purchase clothes for——" She did not finish the sentence, but her eyes softened. "It will be the best," she whispered, "the very best that this blessed bit of paper can buy."

Gordon departed on one of his frequent trips that week. The city real estate was being, bit by bit, rescued from total loss. His absence worried Doris not at all. She was too busy planning that dainty outfit. The pastime was bliss. For hours she pored over sales books, selecting this and rejecting that. Then one afternoon she made a discovery that turned all her sweet anticipation to bitterest gall. Her disappointment swelled to a mountain of grief that exceeded sane reason. Her nervous condition was responsible for half, and the lack of harmony that insensibly filled the Lyndahl home completed the whole. The cause of this distress was due to a bit of delicate work she chanced to observe in the ever-busy fingers of Madam Lyndahl. The little garment the elder woman fashioned was of plain material, and was being sensibly and comfortably constructed. Her needle was flashing busily in and out at the finishing task of herringbone. With narrowed eyes Doris watched the abrogation of what she believed her Heaven-given right. With a voice that seemed to issue from paralyzed lips, she demanded:

"What is that? What are you making?"

Madam Lyndahl worked for a moment in silence. Then:

"I have noticed no sign of preparation," she said. "Therefore I'm making ready for the arrival of my grandchild."

This highly interesting story will be continued in next week's Ledger. Do not miss reading it. A lot of great and timely stories will appear in the Ledger during the coming months. Send in your subscription and you will find yourself repaid ten times over.

* * *

No Complaint.

It was at the vaudeville. The girl with the excruciating voice had just finished her song.

"Just think!" groaned Brown, to the stranger beside him. "We paid real money to hear that!"

"I didn't," was the placid response. "Came in on a 'comp.'"

"But you had to spend the carfare to get here, did you not?" asked Brown.

"Nope," replied the uncomplaining one. "I live in walking distance."

"But," persisted Brown desperately, "at least you hoped to be entertained, not punished."

"No. I didn't care," grinned the stranger. "I came to get away from home. My wife is cleaning house."—Judge.

* * *

Don't Miss This.

If a woman has one daughter who goes away, the Mrs. misses the Miss and the Miss misses the Mrs. If it is two daughters and both are away, the Mrs. misses the Misses and the Misses miss the Mrs. If she has three daughters and two are at one place and one at another, the Mrs. misses the Misses and the Miss misses the Mrs. and the Misses. If she has four daughters and two are at one place while the other two are away from home and separate, the Mrs. misses the Miss and the Misses and the Miss, the Miss and the Misses miss the Mrs. and the Miss misses the Miss and the Misses the Mrs.

* * *

Be Careful.

Newport, as all the world knows, is getting more and more overrun with the newly rich. The newly rich are buying up the finest estates, and the old and exclusive Newport families are retiring to more isolated resorts.

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Jack Sewell's Fortunes

Or, Among the Pearl Islands

By St. George Rathborne

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CHAPTER X.

A WARM WELCOME.

THE light was very unsatisfactory, since the fire had been scattered in every direction, and Jack could not make sure, but he believed from the actions of the chief that he had been successful, and that he carried something in his arms as he leaped in their direction. When he came up Jack discovered that this was so, and his heart gave a thrill of delight at the thought of success in their strange mission.

"We must go," panted Negrito, who had been working under forced draft as it were, and was short of breath; "they may yet come back, and that would be bad, for we should then have to slay. Be quick, and follow! I have found what we seek, and it is well, young senors."

"Bully!" Oscar could not help exclaiming, if it was the last word ever fated to pass his lips; but he did not neglect to chase after the leader, in what was to be a hurry march for the dinghy.

If Negrito failed to keep along the right trail they would find themselves up against stacks of trouble, with that band of head hunters in the vicinity; and these inhabitants of Tiburon were also said to be cannibals as well, which added to the interest of the occasion. But straight as a die the old chief led them along the winding track, just as he had done when they were advancing toward the cache—even the lapse of twenty years and more had not dimmed his recollection of the marks that were to serve as stepping stones along the route; and when ten minutes more had elapsed Jack sniffed the air of the nearby sea.

They came upon the same little pebbly strand where they had made their landing, which spoke wonders for the ability of Negrito. The small boat was just where they had drawn it up on the beach, and somehow Jack found himself laughing over the ease with which the whole enterprise had been conducted. Why, what need was there for anxiety, when everything seemed to happen as though by machine work?

They launched the dinghy and set out to retrace their course among the channels and around the reefs marking the coast at this point, with Negrito as before on the watch, and directing them how to row.

Many times did Jack fasten his eyes upon the object which the Indian had so carefully placed in the bottom of the boat, for he knew that it represented the reward of their voyage into these strange seas. He was no longer consumed with anxiety over the possible outcome of the expedition, but curiosity had now taken its place, and he looked forward with keenest delight to the moment when they should feast their eyes on the treasure-trove.

In and out they wove along, the shores of the little islets appearing much the same in the eyes of the boys; but Negrito knew, and his was the directing mind that shaped their course. And when the usual time had elapsed, behold, the wide sea stretched out before them, with the stars glinting upon the little wavelets that rolled up against the rock barriers. One more turn and then all would be well.

Where in all that gloom did the little felucca lie? They could go straight out until it seemed possible that they must be near the anchorage of the boat, and then, failing to run across her in the dark, strike a match, which was to be the signal for Pedro to show a lantern, and reveal the position of the boat.

Jack began to grow anxious, for it seemed to him that they should by now be in the neighborhood of the vessel; and yet, though he twisted his head around many times, he failed to catch the least indication that pointed to success. Now that the pearls were seemingly in their possession, their responsibilities had increased; for they might reasonably expect that Senor Jose, guessing the cause of their turning back, would deem it a fitting time to make an assault, when they must defend their prize.

"D'ye see hit, matey," asked Oscar, eagerly.

"No, do you?" answered Jack.

"Blimed hif Hi do. Hit's has black has a stack hof cats, so hit his, but hunless that rummy hold fat cove Pedro has dropped overboard, hor fallen hasleep hat 'is post, we can find 'im by flashing a glim, that's boz," remarked the Conch, as usual borrowing no trouble.

Negrito had the eyes of an owl as well as those of an eagle, and what they were unable to detect he had little difficulty in discovering.

"To the right, but a little, Senor Jack—the boat is there!" he said now, and joyfully the two lads bent to the oars, sending the clumsy little dinghy over the swells of the sea until they, too, could detect the mast of the felucca standing up against the star-decked heavens.

All seemed quiet aboard. As they drew up against the side Negrito gave vent to a little cry, as of a sea bird, which Pedro upon hearing would answer, and bend down to assist them over the side.

At the first call there was no response, and surprised at this the old chief repeated the signal; upon which they could hear some sort of booming sound in the interior of the felucca, as of a man kicking his heels against a wooden panel. Oscar gave a grunt of disgust.

"Stash hit, Hi do believe the bally cove 'as gone hand got beastly drunk, hand now 'e carn't come to hassist hus. But Hi reckon has 'ow we hare hable to climb aboard, eh, Jack?" he exclaimed.

Negrito caught his arm.

"Wait! Who knows what has happened here while we were away? Hold your guns ready to use, senors, and spare not if it prove the worst," he hissed, his words giving the boys a strange chill.

They were more cautious about clambering aboard than would otherwise have been the case but for the warning of the shrewd and suspicious Indian; and as they pulled themselves over the rail it was suddenly to find dark figures loom up in front, and feel itching fingers endeavoring to clutch hold upon their persons. At the same instant loud voices rang out, and pandemonium seemed to break loose where but a second before all had been peace and silence.

Jack understood what it all meant. In some manner which they could not fathom as yet, Senor Jose had succeeded in creeping up to the anchored felucca while they were gone. Perhaps Pedro had disobeyed orders and lighted his cigarro, betraying the position of the boat; or it might be some one aboard the yacht had the eyes of a night owl, and was able to see after the fashion of a cat. Whatever had occurred, that they had found the boat and taken Pedro by surprise was a foregone conclusion; and it had been that fellow's bound feet banging against a bulkhead in the endeavor to warn his chief, after the signal had been given, that they had heard.

How fortunate that they were prepared through that caution of Negrito, for otherwise they must have fallen an easy prey to the cunning trap laid for their feet. Jack forgot just then his prejudice against shooting at a human target, for the fire of battle was in his veins, and those raucous shouts and oaths had seemingly relieved him of any sense of responsibility in the matter.

Feeling a hand clutch his arm, he tore away, swung his gun instantly around in that direction, and snapped the trigger. No sooner had the gun been discharged than he pumped another cartridge into place with the easy movement he had learned so well how to manage, and then proceeded to cover another form that was looming up above him.

Jack was not alone in his action, for the dull boom of the shotgun announced that Oscar had taken a hand in the game, and was doing his best to cripple some of the boarders. Negrito had swung himself on board, and was plying his gun as though it might be a war club, knocking men down like ninepins before well-driven balls; and at the same time uttering terrible sounds, presumably the battle cry of his tribe, though to Jack they seemed more like the roaring of a lion in a menagerie cage—he had never heard one in their native African wilds.

Never were men more completely upset in their expectations. These fellows had calculated upon having the easiest possible job, after fortune had favored them in finding the felucca in the dark, and capturing the one left to guard it; and in the twinkling of an eye, as it seemed, the tide had changed, and they were now being beaten to the deck.

Confusion reigned among them, and all they thought of now was a chance to escape before annihilation came. A splash announced that one had already gone overboard, and hardly had that sound ceased before a second told another story.

Just as soon as the first shout arose a light had appeared upon the sea a short distance away, and the steam yacht was seen, lying to. She immediately whistled, as if to signal, and started toward the spot where the felucca was anchored, probably with the intention of throwing the balance of her crew aboard, and crushing the pearl seekers under sheer weight of numbers.

But before that could be accomplished, our friends gave signs of being able to clear their decks of the foe by a vigorous rush, for they had already downed several of the invaders, and others were wildly flying this way and that in the endeavor to avoid conclusions with such valiant antagonists.

Oscar was surely in his glory, and his voice rang out above all other sounds, as he scrambled over the little deck and around the mast in chase of a fugitive who evidently knew little about the science of swimming, to judge from his reluctance about going overboard. But in the end Oscar found his chance to deal him a fierce poke with the muzzle of his gun, and as the fellow was at the time balancing on the ragged edge, he went in with a great splash and a cry of horror.

All these things took place in a comparatively few seconds of time, for when excitement reigns, actions follow each other as fast as one can wink; and our friends had been fully aroused by this trick of the hidalgo.

Two fellows lay groaning upon the deck, but all the others had vanished as if by magic, and it looked as though the game had been decided in favor of the original owners of the felucca. Oscar darted forward into the cabin, and finding only Pedro there, bound and gagged, he cut him free; upon which the furious fat little native, hunting up his big musket, rushed out on deck as if eager to wipe out his disgrace by a display of valor.

Jack had looked around to see if any bold pirate dared try to crawl back over the sides, and it was just then that he heard Negrito give a howl.

"The boat! The dog has stolen our boat, and in it lies the prize we have come so far to find!" the chief shouted, pointing to where their little dinghy was bobbing up and down over the water, propelled by a Mexican, who stood erect and sculled with one of the oars.

Even as Jack stared with a sinking sensation in the region of his heart, he heard a sudden splash, and the next instant saw Negrito cleaving the water with great strokes, and swiftly catching up with the clumsily driven dinghy. Several shots came from the yacht, and bullets splashed in the water around the head of the bold swimmer, but he kept on, utterly reckless of danger.

CHAPTER XI.

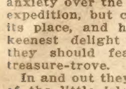
SENOR JOSE HAULS OFF.

IT WAS a critical moment, for the Mexican in the boat had possession of the valuable prize, to gain which our friends had undertaken this adventure, and he was working with might and main to make a getaway. Possibly he did not himself realize just what riches his bark carried, and all his efforts were made with the idea that it was his own life alone that was at stake. If so, the fellow's vanity must have been of the monumental kind, since Negrito had jumped overboard in this fashion and was swimming desperately after him.

Those on the yacht kept a searchlight trained on the spot, and from their solicitude it was plain to be seen that the senor must have suspected just how the ground lay, and why the Indian was so extremely desirous of overhauling the man in the stolen dinghy.

The fellow could not make the boat move fast enough to suit him, for Negrito overhauled it rapidly. There was something so fierce in the aspect of the

YOUR HEART



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swimmer, tearing along through the agitated water like a sea monster, that the Mexican quickly gave over all thought of escaping through speed. He took one agonized look back toward the moving yacht, and realizing that he could not expect succor from that quarter, stood up and raised the oar menacingly.

Negrito was already at the side of the boat, seemingly urged on by springs, so rapid were his movements. Jack saw the upraised oar hurtle through space, and strike where Negrito had been, but the place knew him no longer, for he had dodged with lightning-like rapidity; and as the ashen blade struck the water, those on the felucca witnessed the flash of a brown body upward, and heard the gurgling cry of the Mexican as he was hurled over the side. In a twinkling, as it were, the chief had snatched up the floating oar, whipped it into the tholepin socket, placed the second one in like manner, and was pulling the dinghy around.

All this had happened so quickly that those who observed were stupefied with amazement. Loud cries from the quarter where the yacht was bearing down upon the smaller craft told how they felt about it, and as Jack looked, he saw Senor Jose storming about the deck, waving his arms and shouting orders as fast as he could roll the words out.

Men with guns were hastening to the bows, as if to pour a rain of lead upon the head of the valiant chief; and though they had proved poor marksmen while the target was in the water and moving swiftly, they might have a different story to tell now, with Negrito in plain sight.

It was time the friends of the old chieftain took a hand in the deal, if they expected to see him come out of the mad adventure with a whole skin.

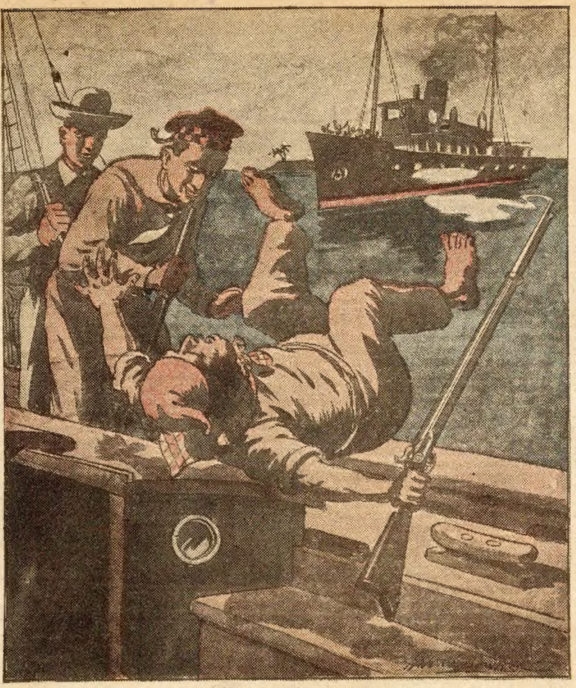
"Oscar!" shouted Jack, in alarm, as he saw these preparations to mow down the plucky native.

"'Ere, hold cock!" answered the Conch, at his elbow.

"We must send in a volley, and scatter the rascals, or they'll pepper the chief!"

"Hall right, me covey! Just give hus the word!" whooped the excited Oscar.

Jack was in the act of leveling his rifle, intending to rattle the remaining shots among the clustering Mexicans, when it seemed to him a thunderbolt had exploded close to his ear, such was the tremendous concussion. The wind from the discharge almost swept him from his feet, but he managed in his astonishment to twist his head around just in time to see the fat figure of Pedro go spinning over like a cart wheel, his monster musket still clutched in his rigid grip.



The fat figure of Pedro went spinning over.

"Bloom me hif 'e hain't done hit this time!" howled Oscar, from somewhere in the great cloud of powder smoke that hung about the stern of the little felucca.

This caused Jack hastily to transfer his attention first to Negrito, who was still rowing like mad for the boat, and then further along the line, taking in the bow of the steam yacht.

It was a fearful spectacle that greeted his eyes there. What wonderful stock of ammunition Pedro had from time to time concentrated in that giant musket no one ever knew; but Jack had strong suspicions that it must have contained fully a pint of missiles in the shape of buckshot, rusty nails and all manner of like tools of destruction, for it had mowed the group of pirates down like a sheaf of ripe grain falling before the scythe of the reaper.

Possibly not one of them was actually killed, for they seemed imbued with a frantic desire to roll about the deck and get out of range as quickly as lay in their power, so that Jack was forcibly reminded of a flock of pigeons into which some gunner had poured a charge of shot at close quarters. Even the gentleman himself, Senor Jose, was dancing around the deck on one leg, gripping the other convulsively; and it looked as though Pedro might have wiped out a portion of the score his chief owed the Mexican hidalgo, through this remarkable potshot of his.

The yacht immediately sleued about, and went at another tangent, as though the fellow in the pilot-house considered it the part of discretion to avoid trying further conclusions with an enemy capable of showering them with bombs after this description. Apparently the danger was over, for the present, at least.

Negrito reached the side of the felucca, and first of all threw aboard some bulky object which he picked up from the bottom of the dinghy; after which he followed suit himself, holding the painter of the little boat in his hand.

"What next?" asked Jack, running up to the chief.

"Get up anchor and leave. In the dark we may give them the slip. Where is my good Pedro, who saved us all by his brave work?" cried the chief.

A weak voice answered him, and in the gloom Pedro was seen trying to get to his feet, and still hugging to his breast the precious musket that had been the undoing of the threatening foe. Jack and Oscar left the two natives to hug each other after their fashion, and proceeded to get things started, looking to immediate departure. Sail was made, after which the anchor came up, and they began to move through the water, there being enough breeze for steerageway.

Tney could note the position of the yacht easily enough, for her lights showed, and for quite some time the voices of excited men were borne on the night air, as they swore and whined and howled in pain, while their wounds were being cared for. It was "some hexciting," as Oscar declared, while he and Jack stood at the rudder, listening to this conglomeration of queer sounds gradually dying away, as they placed more distance between themselves and the other craft.

Jack was willing to admit that it had been quite a strenuous occasion; and, indeed, events had happened in such rapid sequence that it was hard fully to understand them until they had gone over the whole thing in detail, each supplying some necessary information to complete the whole. They hoped it would prove the last they would see of the hidalgo and his unscrupulous crew of cutthroats. Perhaps so severe a lesson might take some of the fire and ginger out of them, especially since the leading spirit had a hole in his dandy leg to grieve over and occupy his attention.

The breeze proved favorable enough to carry them quite a fair distance while night lasted, so that when the dawn broke over the great gulf they had left the scene of the encounter many miles behind. One or two small boats were in sight, but they saw nothing of the yacht.

Pedro was too proud to do menial work after his exploit of the preceding night, and spent most of his time limping up and down the deck, bearing arms, and looking so fierce and yet so comical, that Jack hardly knew whether to admire or laugh at his attitude.

At any rate, there was little for any of them to do so long as the weather held good, for they continued to make decent progress that whole day; while the wind filled the flowing sheet they could lie around, taking turns at dozing, and all gathering about the rude table when Pedro banged a fryingpan with a big spoon to indicate that things were ready to be eaten.

Jack said nothing about the treasure. That was a subject for the chief to open, and until he saw fit to do so the boys could only indulge in vague speculations, and dream dreams.

During the afternoon the weather began to show signs of changing again, and the hazy appearance along the horizon warned Negrito that the period of storm and stress had not wholly passed. They kept within striking distance of the shore, meaning to repeat their former exploit, only this time it was to be hoped an earlier start would allow of their getting behind a point of refuge without taking such hazardous chances.

Islands were still numerous along the gulf coast, and these offered harbors in plenty, if the man at the wheel only knew how to make them without wrecking his vessel. Both boys were secretly pleased when Negrito gave the order for heading shoreward about the middle of the afternoon; for dark clouds were already banking up in the south, and it was only a question of time before another gale broke upon their heads.

Now that he had the prize in his possession, Negrito could exhibit considerable of caution, it seemed, and was willing to scuttle into harbor long before the critical moment arrived. One experience with such peril was quite enough for the most reckless; and when they rounded the nearest island, and found what seemed to be a snug harbor none of those on the felucca regretted the step.

Though the air darkened unusually early, and the wind blew fitfully, the storm held off strangely, and when they ate supper it was still muttering in the distance, with flashes of lightning running along the inky horizon like wildfire. What cared they, so long as the island held in place? For with their mudhook planted on a bottom that had a tenacious grip, they could laugh at the weather.

Now and then the lightning flashed with a brilliance that illuminated the whole scene like day, and at such times each palmetto tree on the shore stood up against the sky as if painted there, the white electric light glinting from each polished leaf as though it were covered with snow.

Jack was standing idly by the mast observing these curious phenomena, when Oscar sidled alongside.

"Hi 'ave been looking hat something queer, shipmate, hand for the life hof me Hi cawn't make hup me mind what hit his. Take a squint hover to port, just where you see that rubber tree hon the other hisland. Blime me hif hit don't look a bit suspicious to me, hold cock," he observed, directing Jack's gaze by an extended finger.

Jack easily saw the tree to which Oscar was pointing, and waiting for the next flash, kept his eyes upon the left side. Then along the horizon flitted the jagged electric current, and Jack, looking, was thrilled by the discovery he made; for straight up above the low-lying top of the rubber tree arose a perpendicular line with several cross-pieces dividing it into sections. And the boy, turning to his comrade, returned his grip and exclaimed:

"There's no doubt about it at all, Oscar; that's a mast as plain as day, and it's a dead sure thing that we're not alone in this snug harbor. The question is, who and what are the men aboard that vessel yonder?"

(Concluded next week.)

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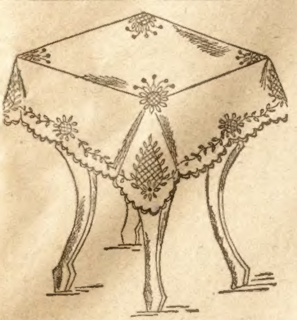

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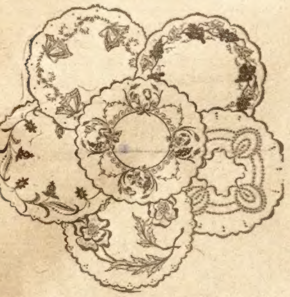

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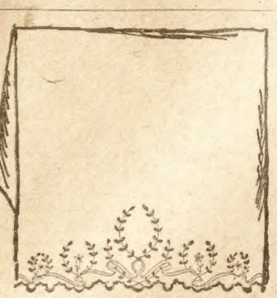

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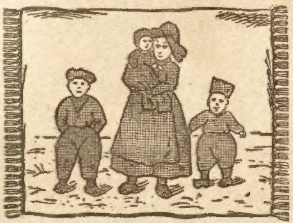

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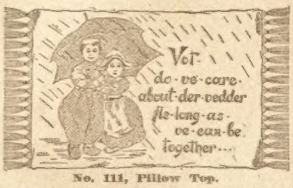

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* * *

The Cabalistic Hand

(Continued from page seventeen.)

fair of his happened some time ago."

"Yes, so it did, but would one be apt to kill a snake that had served his purpose so well, after bringing it so many thousand miles? Unless there was a reason for killing it he would keep it as a pet or give it away."

"A pretty dangerous pet, I should think. I would give it away quick enough if anybody would take it off my hands."

"Exactly, and that's what we want to find out. To whom did Mr. Fraser give his fer-de-lance? When we know that we will have a broad trail to follow. By tracing up the snake we may stumble upon our nameless enemy."

"Perhaps he didn't give it away," I ventured. "He may have it yet."

"No, not now. The fer-de-lance we killed was the one Philip Fraser owned. If he didn't give it away or sell it he must have put it in the bomb we received."

"Mr. Fraser doesn't look like a man who could baffle us. To my mind, sir, he's very commonplace and not particularly brilliant."

"That's the impression one might get of him; but that may all be assumed. Then there are other circumstances connected with it. Fraser had a Cassiopeia plant, and the one who fixed that bomb had been in contact with his odor. You will remember we first traced it by the peculiar odor on the piece of paper left in our office. Then, too, this plant we found in the cellar, while not a Cassiopeia, had at least been sprinkled with the essence of the perfume. Who else except Fraser could lay his hand on a fer-de-lance and this rare perfume?"

I could not answer right away, for the evidence seemed to point directly to the fiance of Miss Dorothy. In some way it seemed as if he must be mixed up with the strange series of events that had threatened our lives.

"But, sir," I said, a moment later, recovering my senses, "we found that Mr. Fraser's fingerprints were not those of the man we're looking for."

"Did we? Did you ever see Fraser's fingerprints?"

"Why, no, of course not, but that night you tried to get them you said it couldn't be Fraser, for his hands were gloved, and you found the real prints on the floor immediately after we had all left the basement."

"So I did, and I was greatly disappointed. But did it ever occur to you, Montague, that Fraser might have played a trick on us? Suppose he removed one of his gloves for an instant, just long enough to make one print in the flour. That, of course, would only confuse us, wouldn't it?"

"I never thought of that," I stammered. "Yes, he could have done that. But," brightening up suddenly, "you said the print was not there when you took the first flashlight picture."

"I never developed that first picture, Montague. You remember I was so annoyed that I crushed it under my heel."

"Yes, sir, and then regretted it."

"It was very foolish of me to act so hastily. Now that picture might have revealed the whole trick, if trick it was. I was so mortified at finding Fraser had gloves on his hands that I gave only a hasty examination of the floor, and then angrily destroyed the only evidence I had—the picture. When I returned later and took a second photograph, the fingerprint was there in the flour."

"Then you believe Mr. Fraser had something to do with it, after all?" I asked eagerly.

"I wouldn't go quite so far as that, Montague, but there are some points we must clear up. Perhaps Fraser can enlighten us. We will go and have a look at his fer-de-lance, and if it is gone we will try to trace it."

(Continued next week.)

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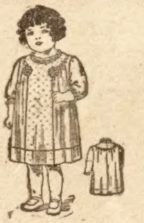

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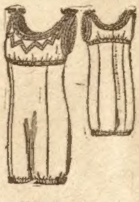

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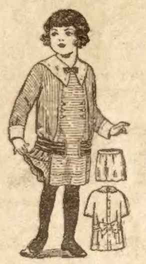
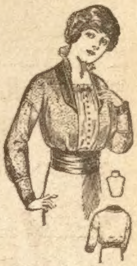
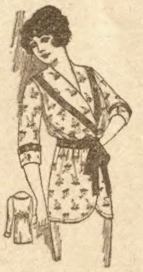


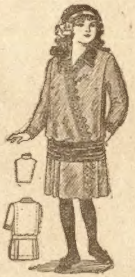
8117 Child's Dress, 4 to 8 years.



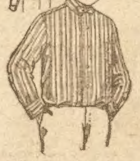
8091 Fancy Blouse, 34 to 42 bust.



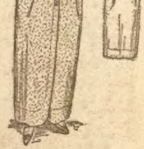
8103 Dressing Jacket, 34 to 44 bust.



8096 Girl's Low Belted Dress, 8 to 14 years.



8111 Boy's Shirt, 6 to 12 years.



8108 Peg Top Skirt, for Misses and Small Women, 16 and 18 years.

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You don't need a single dollar of capital—you don't need anything that we don't supply **free.** This is the house that treats its agents right—the house that supplies you with outfits that do the talking and selling for you—the house that gives you the most novel and remarkable lightning-selling helps ever gotten out. This is the house that supplies you with elegant sales-making presents to give your customers. We do all that and more—we do everything. There isn't a thing known within reason we won't do to make it easy for our agents to make big money. We show you how to sell nine out of every ten you call on. All you have to do is wear the nifty suit we give you free and show our magnificent samples and smashed prices and the sale is closed—your big profit is made. You don't have to be "smooth-tongued." You don't have to be educated. You don't need a big bunch of friends to sell Great Central made-to-measure garments. They sell themselves! You can do it—you can make $60 a week—as easy as our thousands of other agents. We don't care what you are doing now, you needn't give up your job right away. You can make big money on the side, in your spare time. Then when you see how easy it is to make big money, you can devote **all** your time to taking orders for Great Central Clothes and make more money than you ever thought possible.

We Beat Them All

Our agents are the livest lot, the most enthusiastic lot, the most prosperous lot, you ever saw. Talk about orders! They simply pour them in. Why? Because we make it dead easy for them! We wiped competition off the map. When any other agent tries to butt in, our agent simply shows our swell samples, nifty styles, low prices, to get the order quick. The live wire agents are rapidly realizing the advantage of tying up with us—they're throwing away their cheap outfits and coming over with us day by day—over where the big money is easy and the sailing smooth—over with the house that's **"First in Everything."** We want you no matter what **you do now.** We'll give you exclusive territory—show you how to be prosperous, independent and the swellest dressed fellow in your town. We will send you our wholesale tailoring outfit, which cost us $76,000.

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In all your life, wherever you've been, whatever you've seen, whatever you've thought of, you've never beheld such a dazzling, stupendous, magnificent sample display as our famous **"Book of Gold"**—the Masterpiece de Luxe Edition, which we give you free. Think of it! 96 of the niftiest, up-to-the-second styles—the latest things out—the styles every man wants but can't get outside of Chicago and New York except from our agents—styles that are the rage in the metropolis—styles no local tailor can for the life of him duplicate—and 225 of the most gorgeous, elegant, richest patterns you ever laid eyes on—every single one absolutely different and distinctive. We give you this glittering, mammoth **"Book of Gold"** absolutely **free.** We don't charge a cent—you don't make a deposit. It's the grandest and mightiest salesman ever gotten out! It gets the orders where "conversation" would fall down. Our agents are wild about it—amazed, astonished, delighted. **Fink of Arkansas** wrote: "I was absolutely dumfounded." **Martin of South Dakota** wrote: "There isn't any trouble selling for the Great Central." **Lawton of Mississippi** wrote: "It certainly is a corker." No other agent or dealer can get a look-in when you show our sample book of made-to-order suits or overcoats. **When you show up, other agents shut up!** You get the orders—you get the big profits —$60 a week and more.

Grand Suit FREE!

Made to your own measure from any style and fabric you select, without a cent cost to you. We even pay the express charges. That means just what it says—there's no bluff about it. We simply don't stop at any expense to make our agents successful. Every time we turn around we think of something new to help make big money for them. That's our method—that's why our agents are prosperous—that's why they stick with us—that's why we are positively the largest, strongest and best wholesale tailoring concern of our kind in America. We give you this swell suit or overcoat free because we want you to be the real thing—the fashion model—the style setter in your town and wherever you go. The minute you put it on everybody will notice your classy appearance—your friends and even strangers will ask you where you got it. They will want one like it and you take their order. It's the easiest thing you ever saw. This is no bunk—we're telling you the absolute truth—the experience of all our agents. They tell us how easy they find it and we tell you.

Surest Guarantee Known!

You ought to see our Customer's Assurance Certificate of Guarantee. You ve heard about and read about other guarantees, but what do they really guarantee? What good are they? You don't want "conversational" guarantees—your customers don't want common "talk." Not on your life! You want something **legal,** binding, iron-clad, and here's where you get it. Just remember our Customer's Assurance Certificate of Guarantee stands back of every Great Central garment to guarantee we positively refund purchase price if after examination any garment fails to give absolute satisfaction. It guarantees every single garment shipped by us is **tailor-made** especially to order from measurements sent us in each individual case. Remember that we absolutely do not make ready-made garments. We make Great Central garments so far superior to all that every customer is delighted and orders again—nobody ever has a single kick coming. Great Central styles are the work of versatile minds of the cleverest designers high salaries can employ. Our original, classy ideas cost us fortunes every season. The quality of every garment—the unexcelled workmanship and the remarkably perfect fit is the result of brains, ability and care. Any man who wants real swell clothes—wants perfect fit—wants every feature the best—must wear Great Central Clothes. Even competitors will own up to this if you can corner them.

You Can!

Makes no difference what you work at—salesman, clerk, book-keeper, office man, teamster, brick-layer, hod-carrier, driver, tradesman, waiter, farmer, sailor, motorman, or anything else—you can earn big money taking orders for Great Central made-to-measure clothes and we will prove it to you mighty quick if you send the coupon now. **Gannon of Ohio** wrote: "I am pleased to be working for a company so straight in their dealings and do as they advertise they will do." We have hundreds of letters just like this. Don't work any more for a one-horse concern—come with us—connect with

The Big Wholesale Tailors

SMASH Go Prices!

The tariff on woolens has been reduced—and, as always, we are "First in Everything." We pulled off a big trick this season that bewildered, dumbfounded and shamed other manufacturers. We got in ahead of them all with our stupendous orders for the classiest, most exclusive fabrics manufactured by foreign and domestic mills. Again we can undersell everybody $3 to $5 on Suits, Pants or Overcoats. Again we enable our agents to give competitors the laugh and walk away with the orders and profits. Talk about smashing prices! Everybody wonders how we do it!

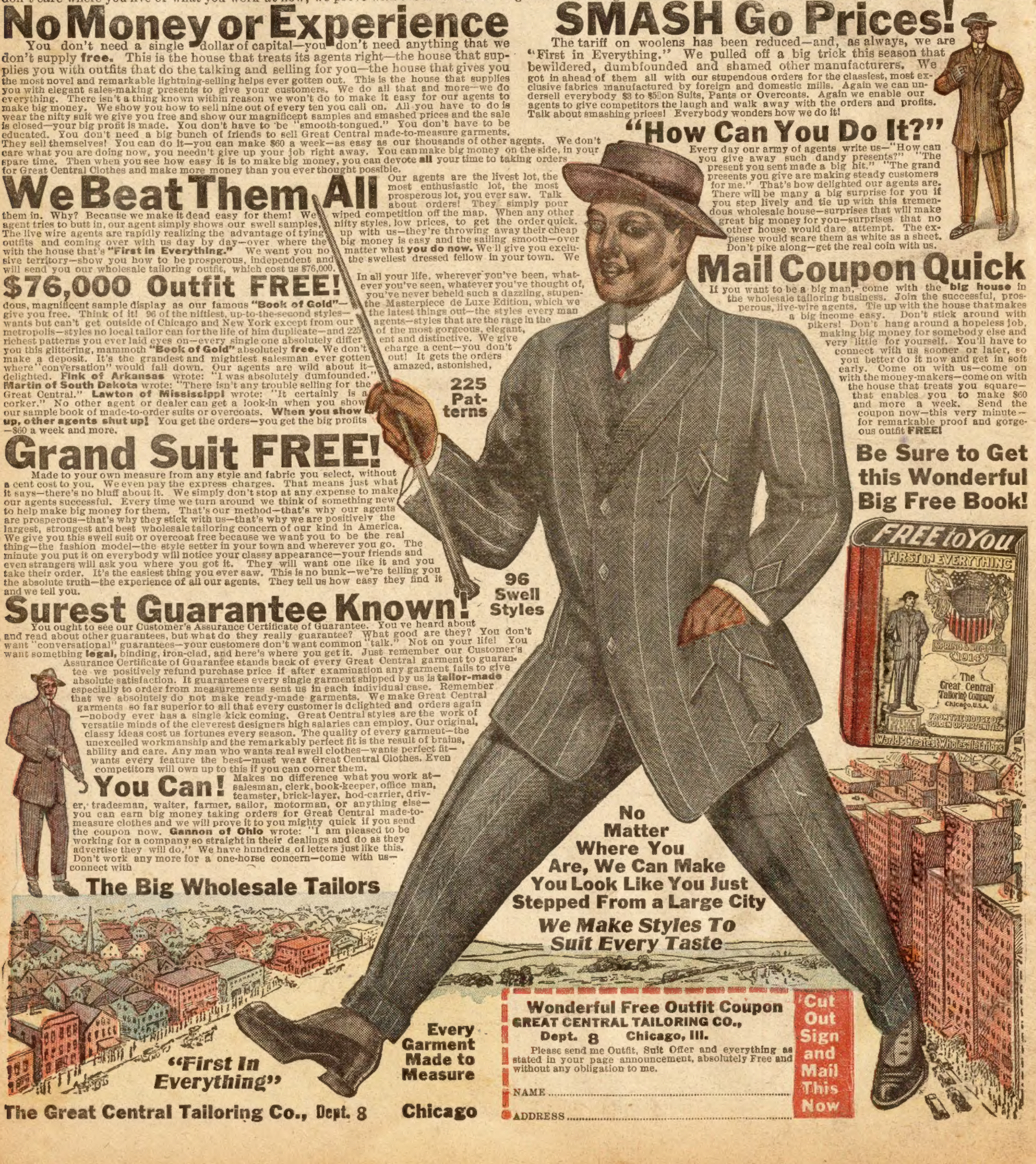
"How Can You Do It?"

Every day our army of agents write us—"How can you give away such dandy presents?" "The present you sent made a big hit." "The grand presents you give are making steady customers for me." That's how delighted our agents are. There will be many a big surprise for you if you step lively and tie up with this tremendous wholesale house—surprises that will make great big money for you—surprises that no other house would dare attempt. The expense would scare them as white as a sheet. Don't pike along—get the real coin with us.

Mail Coupon Quick

If you want to be a big man, come with the **big house** in the wholesale tailoring business. Join the successful, prosperous, live-wire agents. Tie up with the house that makes a big income easy. Don't stick around with pikers! Don't hang around a hopeless job, making big money for somebody else and very little for yourself. You'll have to connect with us sooner or later, so you better do it now and get in soft early. Come on with us—come on with the money-makers—come on with the house that treats you square—that enables you to make $60 and more a week. Send the coupon now—this very minute—for remarkable proof and gorgeous outfit **FREE!**

Be Sure to Get this Wonderful Big Free Book!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